

The Washingtonians

Pauline Bradford Mackie

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The Washingtonians

Works of
Pauline Bradford Mackie



Mademoiselle de Berny

A Story of Valley Forge

Ye Lyttle Salem Maide

A Story of Witchcraft

A Georgian Actress

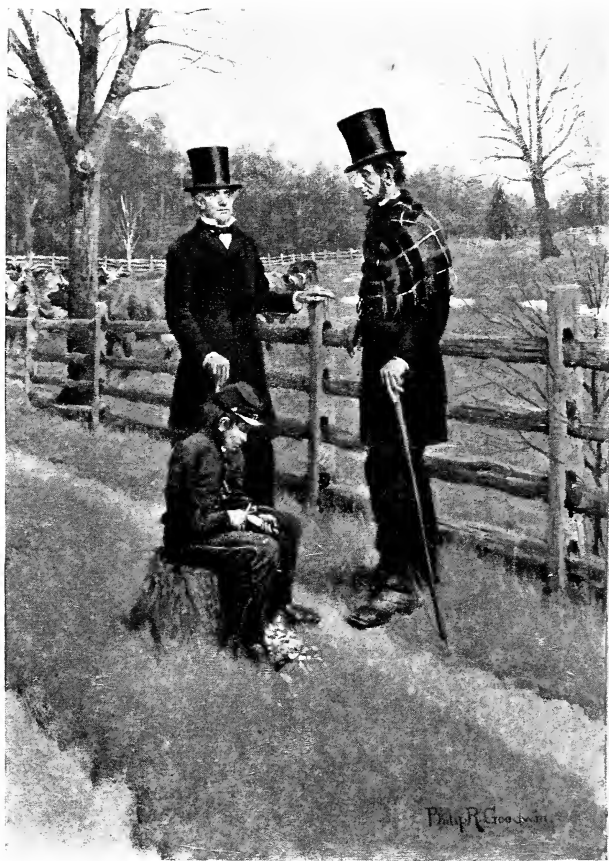
The Washingtonians



L. C. PAGE & COMPANY
200 Summer Street, Boston, Mass.

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“THE PRESIDENT WAITED PATIENTLY.”

(See page 302.)

The Washingtonians

By

Pauline Bradford Mackie

(Mrs. Herbert Müller Hopkins)

Author of

"Mademoiselle de Berny," "Ye Lyttle Salem
Maide," "A Georgian Actress," etc.

With a Frontispiece by

Philip R. Goodwin



BOSTON

L. C. PAGE & COMPANY

MDCCCII

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Mrs. Elizabeth Walbridge

THIS STORY, WHICH HER LOVING SYMPATHY INSPIRED,

IS DEDICATED BY

“ONE OF HER CHILDREN”



The Washingtonians

Chapter I

MRS. MATTHEWS and her father's private secretary sat on the upper step of the low verandah. The two had been gossiping idly for an hour past, and they still lingered with the pleasant languor of the Indian summer afternoon.

The place had a quaint air, homelike, although it suggested an old-fashioned country courthouse. From the four fluted white pillars the Virginia creeper hung scarlet, and its ripe purple berries when they dropped left a stain like wine on the floor of the porch. The great front door stood hospitably open. Above the lintel was the sunburst of glass, then the fashion, and down either side of the door were panel windows. The ground in front sloped by long and gentle reaches to the country road. Two stiff rows of Lombardy poplars bordered the gravelled driveway.

Mrs. Matthews yawned. "How stupid you are," she remarked. "You haven't said anything for half an hour at least. I've often

thought what a pleasant time I might have if other people were as interesting and good-natured as I am myself."

"I always said you were good-natured," Prentiss answered, stooping to select some pebbles from the driveway.

"Oh, I don't mind what you think," she retorted. "There are those who find me fascinating. I suppose I ought to go in and dress for dinner, but the day is so delicious. Look into what drifts the leaves have blown. We must have a bonfire supper-party and roast potatoes. And how yellow that late maple is! What are you going to do with those stones? Play hop-sotch? You'd better call Virginia. You two are such children."

He glanced up quickly. His face, melancholy in repose, was charming when he smiled. "I merely had an idea of how I wanted to group a scene in my new play. I'll show you in a minute." He drew out his pencil and marked a space carefully on the floor.

She watched him, smiling. He had his overcoat thrown lightly around his shoulders, but had not put on his hat. "You have such old-fashioned hair, David, just the kind of silky, chestnut ringlets the young minister always had in the sentimental novels our grandmothers used to read. Suppose you had pink cheeks and china blue eyes as well? Wouldn't you be ridiculous?"

"Do you think it's nice of you to say that?" he protested, half-laughing, but his gray eyes sober with thought. "Let me see. How was I going to have that? Oh, now I know. This is the stage, of course." He made some dots within the enclosed space. "This is a table. Over here are two chairs, and another one is here. Now here's my sofa for my lovers. This is to be a modern play in blank verse, but it's difficult to make it convincing in a prose age. Still, I shall succeed in time, I know. This is my heroine, modern, ambitious, beautiful, your style."

She smiled.

"Still, not of a beauty which would appeal to the poet. She shall typify a certain growing class of American women possessed of an egotism so extreme as to approach greatness."

"Really and truly, David," put in Mrs. Matthews, her beautiful eyes twinkling, "I've often wondered where you got your nice disposition."

"And this big stone," he continued, "is my heroine's father, a man of tremendous heart and brain. This smooth little fellow is my villain. We'll call him, say, Senator—"

"Never mind the name," she interrupted. "Who's this?"

"That's Countess Polonski, but I don't know what to do with her. She's all that is desirable to give the richness of a foreign back-

ground. Her husband doesn't come in this act. I'll reserve him. She's just the person to give colour to my play, and I've had her say lots of witty things, but I can't make her do anything except walk around like a figure-piece on which I've hung my pertinent sayings. It's rather perplexing, but I won't give her up. I'll wait to see if she won't do something positive in real life."

"You make me think of a big spider, David," said Mrs. Matthews, "and your awful modern play is your web, your pretty parlour, which you are inviting all us poor flies to enter. I shall warn Katrina to commit no indiscretion. Who's this?"

"That's Virginia."

"Oh, Virginia."

They both laughed.

"She's a precious child," said Prentiss. "But take her out. She doesn't come in this scene. This is my heroine's husband. He's rich."

"But the plot," she interposed, impatiently, "tell me what it is. I can see you're putting us all in, and I don't think it's a bit nice of you. But what I want to know is the plot. All I ask of you is not to make me too sweet. I can carry off a touch of malice, but don't make me out a gentle Amelia."

"My plot isn't fully developed. The only parts I have finished are my love scenes, and

they made themselves. The play has a political bearing and is to be laid right here in the Capital. I shall manufacture some scheme which my heroine shall divulge only to the villain in order to gain his assistance. But this, you see, gives rise to a delicate question. Should or should not the lady repose confidence in a man other than her husband?" He drew out his note-book. "I must jot down that grouping. It promises action."

His companion rose. As she stepped by her skirts brushed the pebbles wide. "Oh, I'm so sorry," she said, laughing, "but accidents will happen when playwrights become impertinent."

As she entered the spacious hall which ran straight through the centre of the house, she saw that the further door was open and that the negroes were loitering on the back steps. Her own maid was standing with a basket of snowy clothes on her head, her arms akimbo, eyeing saucily the butler who was talking excitedly. The other servants looked on grinning.

"Ellen," called Mrs. Matthews, "is your ironing finished?" Her voice, perfect in quality, had the ring of authority. There was a scattering and disappearance of the idlers.

She went slowly up the broad staircase and down the hall to her cousin's room.

"Come in," called a happy voice in answer to her rap. "The door isn't locked, is it?"

She entered a small room, in which the curtains had been carefully drawn to exclude the daylight. The wax candles on the brackets of the mahogany bureau were burning. A girl stood in front of the mirror, draping a black lace scarf about her shoulders. They were white, pretty shoulders, girlishly thin. Her thick brown hair was knotted low in the nape of her neck. Lashes, long and curling, gave a starry look to her blue eyes.

She hurriedly drew off the scarf. "I was just trying to see how this old thing would look at night." She blew out the candles. "Still, Portia, it's real lace even if it is old, and I never can feel anything but a lady if I have on a bit of real lace, can you?"

Virginia was embarrassed. Attention to her toilet in the presence of such a woman as her cousin seemed presumption, as if she should dream of being anything but insignificant in the presence of such beauty.

Mrs. Matthews seated herself at the window and pushed open the green-shuttered blinds. "No wonder your cheeks are so flushed," she remarked, "the air is stifling in here."

"Are they too pink?" asked Virginia, anxiously, "I did put on just a touch. Does it look unnatural?"

"You vain child! At your age!" said her

cousin. "I ought to be dressing myself. I merely dropped in to see if you'd arranged the flowers for the table. I've been for a stroll and I brought home this splendid goldenrod. Will you attend to it?"

Virginia took the feathery sprays, and, sitting down on the edge of the bed, began to rearrange them. "What a lovely yellow! Uncle Phineas likes the goldenrod so much, doesn't he? I'll put this in the big Canton bowl in the hall."

The low western sunlight that Mrs. Matthews had let into the room seemed to concentrate upon the gorgeous bloom, which filled Virginia's lap and cast a saffron reflection upon her naked arms and shoulders and bending face. She laughed.

"Portia dear," she cried, "I do love beautiful colour so much. Gloomy colours make me sad. If I could only wear yellow, but it doesn't become me, does it?"

"Just one thing more," said Mrs. Matthews, "then I must go. If Tom should bring Mr. La Cerf home for dinner, — he said he was going to look him up to-day, and Tom never can meet a friend without urging him to come home with him to dinner, you know, — I want you to keep him out of my way and give me an opportunity to talk to Senator Chadwick."

"Yes, indeed," cried Virginia, casting the

goldenrod on the bed and going over to the mirror. She forgot her cousin's beauty and spoke as woman to woman. "You don't think my neck is too thin to wear that scarf, do you?" she inquired anxiously. She picked up her handglass and held it so as to see the back of her head in the large mirror. "I don't know, though. I'm pretty thin. Still, I'm artistic. Take the lines of my head and neck. I haven't the blood of the Fairfaxes in me for nothing. I guess I'll wear it. Portia," she added as her cousin was leaving the room, "would you call Mr. La Cerf the handsomest man you ever saw?"

"For an Indian, yes," answered Mrs. Matthews. "I always feel when my back is toward him as if there were a panther at my heels. I suppose it's the racial prejudice. Besides, he always makes me feel as if I ought to be a missionary. He's so far from being really civilised."

"He's civilised," protested Virginia; "he's been to Harvard and he's a good churchman."

"Fiddlesticks!" retorted Mrs. Matthews. "He's perfectly uncultured and he's superstitious. He enjoys the rites of the Church as he would a snake-dance or pow-wow."

She found her maid, a pretty mulatto, putting away the clean clothes.

"Do that later, Ellen," she said. "Go down and see if the papers have come."

While the girl brushed out her mistress's long and shining hair and carried it up deftly in a golden twist on her head, Mrs. Matthews read the New York morning papers which had just arrived. She reached over and took the scissors from her dressing-table and cut out several articles. The mutilated papers fell rustling about the kneeling maid, who with all her race's love of luxury drew on with caressing touches the white silk stockings and fastened the pearl-embroidered slippers.

When she was dressed save for the putting on of her gown, Mrs. Matthews sent the girl away. Then she slipped on a little dressing-jacket and seated herself at her desk. It was a massive piece of furniture and had an air of almost masculine dignity and simplicity. Otherwise the large room, with its lofty and elaborate frescoed mouldings, was distinctly feminine. The chairs and sofa were upholstered in English chintz of a flowered design and the windows had curtains of the same material. The fireplace was of white marble elaborately carved in leaves and bunches of grapes. The chief ornaments on the mantel were two large blue china urns with much adornment of pink roses, cupids, and gilt. These had been her father's wedding gift to her mother. Even their hideousness through long attachment wakened a humourous tenderness in Portia. She finished pasting the clippings in a book

bulky with many other newspaper articles. Then almost mechanically, absorbed in thought, she arose and crossed over to the wash-stand and removed the paste from her finger-tips. She glanced at the clock and saw that it was still early for dinner, so she turned down the lamp she had lighted on her desk and seated herself at the open window.

"I am in love with the day," she said to herself, smiling. "I cannot bear to see it go." And she thought of George Herbert's poem — a favourite of her father's — beginning

"Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright."

Opposite the window rose the column of the verandah with its encircling vine now almost bare of leaves. The trees of the distant woods were hazy against the yellow west. Some one was making a bonfire, and the blue smoke wavered up. Her gaze travelled over dusky, familiar outlines. The land she looked upon was her own. It had once been her father's, but she had persuaded her husband to buy it and deed it to her. She had intense love of possession, and the pride of ownership rose in her heart as she gazed. On her father's side she came of good farming people. She had put considerable money in the bank drawn from the surplus of milk and eggs the place produced. For the present, however, she sent

all that was not needed for household use to the sick soldiers in the hospital.

She could see the dark moving shapes of her herd of cows on the country road, and the silhouette of an old darkey, slouching after them with his dog at his heels. She had one serious anxiety, and the news in the paper had been disquieting. Moreover, the war reports were as they always seemed to be, of the worst. Yet as she gazed out upon the peaceful scene, and heard the cows' mild lowing and the jangling of their bells, her innate love of the country was satisfied and she felt serene as the evening.

The door opened. "Are you here, Portia?" asked her husband's voice. "Oh, I see you."

She turned, and suddenly realised by the brightness of the low burning lamp how dark it had grown. She drew the curtains. "How do you feel to-night, Tom?"

"I'm tired," he answered, turning up the light which caught first the gold on his uniform and then illumined his face, which was both pale and worn. "I've had the blues all day. I don't get my strength back, and I'd hoped to return to my brigade before this." He flung aside his cape and sat down in the chair his wife vacated to watch her complete her toilet. He was five years older than she, but he had a boyish look that made their ages seem about

the same. Her beauty was far too perfect a type to suggest girlishness. There was no opening of the bud in her, but an early fulfilment.

She filled a glass of wine for him from the decanter on her bureau.

"By the way," he said after drinking it, "I picked up La Cerf at the club and brought him home. I told Jim to lay another plate."

"I knew you would," she replied. "I told Virginia so. You should have asked him to come to-morrow. Whenever I don't want a person at a big dinner I always ask him to come and dine quite informally with us some other day. It is most satisfactory. He is flattered by the intimacy, and my party hasn't been spoiled by an uncongenial person."

General Matthews laughed. He was warmed by wine and cheered by her companionship. She was putting on her hooped satin skirt, and he had to move his chair out of the way. "There would be no soldiers if men had to fight in such toggery. I like that gown on you."

"Yes, dear," she answered, absently, clasping her pearl necklace. "Was father in good spirits to-night?"

"I haven't seen him," he said. "La Cerf and I took the 'bus out Fourteenth Street and walked the rest of the way."

"There's some one," she interrupted, "I

heard the carriage. I must run on down. Come as soon as you can."

Her hand on the door-knob, she looked back. His gaze annoyed her. "Shall I pour you out some more wine? Do you feel faint?" Then she remembered that she had not offered to kiss him when he came in.

"You do put on such pathetic airs when you feel ill, Tom," she remarked, half-laughing, half-vexed, and going back she kissed him.

Chapter II

MRS. MATTHEWS cast a swift glance of approval over the table. She recognised her cousin's artistic touch in the arrangement of the flowers, and, as she sank into a chair, she bestowed upon the girl a charming smile. Virginia coloured with child-like sensitiveness to praise or blame.

"Senator Chadwick sent word that he might be detained," she announced, "and so I thought we would not wait."

"It was very kind of you to take me in," said La Cerf, for whom a place had been made next to Virginia. "I didn't know I was stumbling in upon a dinner when I asked the general to take me home to-night. By the way, I saw our friend Fowler off to-day. He was well enough to leave the hospital and re-join his regiment. I didn't envy him. I am glad mine is the peaceful pursuit of the scholar."

He smiled and toyed with the rose at his plate. His brown hand was small as a woman's. The soft, shaded lights and his faultless evening dress brought into strong relief his fierce and handsome features. He

was the adopted son of an army officer, who, upon his death, had appointed General Matthews the boy's guardian. Education had made him effeminate. He pretended to scholarly achievement, and had managed to remain a few months in the freshman class at Harvard. Prentiss was at Cambridge at the same time, and had tutored him in Greek and Latin, but had at last resigned the task in despair. For La Cerf, basking in the sunshine at the window, would interrupt the lessons by leaning out to watch some girl go by in the street below, or start to tease his dog, or again suddenly rise and seat himself at the piano. His idea of conscientious work consisted in staying through the hour. At the end of it he would whistle to his dog, and go cheerfully away to watch the college crew practising on the Charles. He had been too lazy even to try for a seat in the boat.

Now, as he protested his scholarly tastes, Prentiss, recalling the Indian's many flirtations, was moved to wickedness.

"Conjugate *amo*, La Cerf," he said.

"Be still, both of you," commanded Mrs. Matthews. "Elise, pardon me. I've been trying to hear what you're saying."

"I was merely saying that the trouble with the army and navy life is that you never know where you may be ordered next, especially now," answered her guest. "I'm so glad Mr.

Haas's position keeps him at home. However, I'm not so selfish but that I'd give almost anything to have this horrid war ended, though of course I can scarcely take the same interest that I would if I still considered myself an American."

Countess Polonski, the wife of the Russian minister, shrugged her bare shoulders, and cast her dark eyes heavenward. Then she lowered her gaze, and addressed herself with energy to the speaker.

"Bah, my dear Elise! That much," with a fillip of her jewelled fingers, "for your patriotism. I am a Russian, but had I been born a German, and my husband twice the Russian he is, I should have called myself a German. Or, had I been English or French, I should consider myself English or French to the day of my death. But," with a brilliant, laughing glance around the table, "had I been born an American, my husband, though he were twenty times a Russian, should become an American citizen."

"Do not fail to specify that he should be a Northerner also," suggested General Matthews, in whose mind the subject of war was ever uppermost.

Mrs. Haas chose to ignore the Russian's speech. She lifted the white rose at her plate and inhaled its fragrance.

"Your flowers are lovely to-night, my

dear," she remarked, drawing the long stem through the belt of her short-waisted gown. The green leaves and the masses of reddish-gold hair that etherealised her small, pale face were the only touches of colour about her. Her husband was correspondent of the *New York Chronicle*. He and his wife moved almost entirely in diplomatic circles. He was the son of a noble German family, and while visiting in America he had married the daughter of his boarding-house keeper. The couple now awaited hopefully the death of his uncle, whose heir he was, and whose title he would take upon his recall to his ancestral home. He took a naïve enjoyment in the excellent dinner, and carried on in an undertone a conversation with his neighbour, General Matthews.

Secretary West at the head of the table tried to catch what they were saying. He was a man of tremendous build, with a great head and chest. His intellect, powerful rather than brilliant, shone with a steady light in his bluish-gray eyes overshadowed by level brows. His expression of predominating mind was softened by the mobile curves of his mouth, at once passionate and sensitive. He was smooth shaven, and this absence of beard emphasised the Greek outlines of his face. It was significant that his best likeness had been done in marble.

"Did I understand you to say that you had later news than to-night's paper gives us?" he asked.

"No," answered Haas. "I was only saying that all the rebels want now is a chance to give in gracefully. I saw the President to-day, and he said that they would give in on any terms, almost. What he wants is this bloodshed stopped."

"It's nearing the end rapidly now," the Secretary rejoined. "It's only a matter of endurance, and yet I sometimes fear it may languish through another four years."

"That is not likely," put in Haas. "We will hope for a change in administration." His glance was significant. He took much more interest in politics than did his wife, although she was an American born.

Secretary West, fearful of sinking into a depression that would throw a cloud over the dinner, forced his attention away from the subject of the war.

"Virginia," he asked, affectionately, "what have you been doing all day?"

"I? Oh, lots of things," she replied, turning brightly from fastening La Cerf's rose on the lapel of his coat. "The gypsies have come again, and I have been to see them. The woman told my fortune. She said I was to be married within a year."

"How I love gypsies!" cried Countess Po-

lonski. "They're so full of colour. Can't we go to see them after dinner? Think of the firelight dancing on the trees, and the swarthy faces! There's such a wild sadness about those people."

"They're a set of chicken thieves," interposed her hostess. "I shall have them chased off the place early. They all hate me from past experience. They wouldn't tell me any such good fortune as they did you, Virginia."

"But you are married, Portia dear!" cried Virginia, at which every one laughed.

"There is no beauty so picturesque and fascinating as that which resembles the pure Romany gypsy's," remarked Haas. His glance at the Russian's brilliant face gave his words a personal meaning.

"You forget," she retorted. "How about transfigured angels?"

A ripple of laughter went around the table, in which all but the Secretary, who did not understand the reference, joined.

"To come but once in contact with heavenly things has its effect for ever upon the—dress," murmured Prentiss, in an aside to Countess Polonski.

"Not at all, Mr. Prentiss," cried Mrs. Haas, a trifle sharply. "It was my own peculiar style of dress that first gave the artist his idea."

"I really didn't mean you to hear me

then," he said, so penitently that she smiled a forgiveness.

"But the story! Let's have the story!" cried General Matthews, rousing himself guiltily from a fit of abstraction, as he happened to meet his wife's blue eyes fixed upon him.

"It isn't much of a story, but it was provoking, wasn't it, Wilhelm?" said Mrs. Haas, with an appealing glance at her husband. "An artist, a friend of ours, received an order for a stained-glass window to be put in a church in — well, never mind where. Only, you'd be surprised if I told you. At the artist's request, I posed for the angel. A beautiful design! I had on this very gown — I never say dress, it sounds so. As I was saying, I had on this very —"

"Robe," suggested Prentiss.

"With my hair flowing over my shoulders," she continued. "And would you believe it, my dear Secretary, those horrid deacons refused to accept the window!"

"What reason did they give?" asked the Secretary, drawing his judicial brows together.

"They said it didn't have wings!"

"Wings!" he cried, in wonder. "What didn't have wings?"

"I, the angel," she explained. "The artist made me a transfigured angel, one without wings, you know; a mortal caught up to heaven. But those wretched deacons persisted

that all angels had wings, or else they weren't angels."

"Well, I must say it's the first time I ever heard of angels without feathers myself," he commented, much amused.

"'The wing wherewith we fly to heaven,'" quoted Prentiss, with irritating aptness.

"You don't need wings to convince us of your true worth, Mrs. Haas," observed General Matthews, kindly. "We are none of us deacons."

Dinner was nearly over when the peal of the doorbell was heard echoing through the hall.

"By the pricking of my thumbs," began Prentiss, softly.

"It's Senator Chadwick," said Mrs. Matthews. "I should think you'd be ashamed of yourself, David."

"I'm sorry to be so late," the Senator said, taking his seat. "But I had to meet with the committee. Thank you, I have dined, Mrs. Matthews. Still, I don't know; a little of the wine and fruit, perhaps. Nothing more, I beg you." His voice was exquisitely modulated. He sat silent, fingering the stem of his glass, his eyes upon the ruby sparkle of the wine.

Virginia caught the gleam of light beneath his drooping lids. "He's getting ready to spring," she thought. Glancing up, she met La Cerf's dark look fixed on her, and flushed with a strange mingling of terror and delight.

The conversation again became general, and, in a manner, intimate, as is apt to be the case in a small circle of friends having much the same prejudices and traditions. They spoke chiefly of the war, of the chaotic condition of affairs, political and social, then existing in Washington. Haas related that the President had been criticised for attending a Marine Band concert. "As if the poor man should not have his music! Next they will grudge him the time he takes to eat. His music! Ah, no man in my country would wish to deprive even his worst foe of music. How could we live without it, my Elise?" smiling at his wife, whom he adored.

Countess Polonski, always daring, referred to the latest gossip, that the President's wife entertained Southern sympathies. She was gravely rebuked by the Secretary himself.

"I fear she has not conciliated the newspaper reporters, and, if so, there is no limit to the calumny they will spread about her. I myself know what it is to suffer bitterly from just such unwarranted personal attacks." His sensitive nostrils quivered scornfully.

"Well, anyway," cried little Mrs. Haas, "she doesn't dress in very good taste. Now, does she?"

She could see herself in the mirror of the heavy walnut sideboard opposite. That white, childish figure, with its pensive face, its masses

of golden hair, behind the gleaming array of the family silver, fascinated her. The glass was like the smooth surface of a lake, and she was reminded of a water-lily.

"She is an excitable woman and she has had a hard row to hoe, but I know she is kindly at heart," spoke General Matthews.

"Even if she did call me a hussy," said his wife, laughing. "But that isn't nearly as fatal as if she had said I didn't dress well."

Matthews continued earnestly, not heeding her remark, "So many prominent people are falsely accused of Southern sympathies that suspicion runs riot. The danger is that such a wicked and libellous report may cause some crank to set fire to the White House or to assassinate its mistress, poor woman."

"This sympathy — for her," sighed Mrs. Matthews, with a comical glance.

"I guess you can take care of yourself, my dear," he retorted, dryly.

"My foolish tongue!" cried Countess Polonski, with a smile that seemed to include them all in an indulgent condemnation of herself. "I must be more discreet, only — but there, I will say nothing. Am I not admirable in putting my good resolution into practice so soon?"

"I know what you are thinking," remarked Senator Chadwick. "You are hoping that we shall have a different social régime in the new

administration." His eyes lingered in unconscious admiration upon her face. "This evening my committee drank the health of the honourable gentleman whom we hope to see our next President. He is a believer in the one term principle."

Secretary West was staring at him.

"A believer in the one term principle," he repeated, slowly.

"My dear friend," cried Haas, his face lighting with genuine warmth, "I drink to your health and success!"

Countess Polonski, her glass half-way to her lips, glanced at her hostess. "To you also," she said, and drank.

Secretary West rose to respond to the toast. In moments of excitement his complexion acquired a luminous pallor. His fine eyes held a liquid brilliancy like his daughter's. But no quick change of expression could impart vivacity to him. He was built upon such massive and regular lines that any play of emotion was like the changing light upon a rock, on the surface merely. One felt that the real man was ponderous, unyielding, granite-like.

"It is some weeks," he began, "since this committee — with Senator Chadwick at its head — waited upon me and urged me to consent to the use of my name as a candidate for the Presidential office. As you know, perhaps, I reserved my judgment. I have not as yet

replied. Still, day by day, I might almost say hourly, so continual is the thought of it in my mind, I am becoming more and more disheartened over the manner in which the war is allowed to drag on. I feel that if I were at the head of the government I could bring the war to a speedy close. I would prosecute it with the greatest energy and refuse to let it languish longer. Conscious of my own rectitude, admitting my high and honourable ambition for the Presidency, knowing I esteem paramount to all else the good of the country, I will give my consent to your committee. If my consent shall prove to be a mistake, it will, at least, be one of patriotism."

Prentiss was first to rise and shake hands with him. The others followed his example, with one exception.

Mrs. Matthews alone noticed that her husband had withdrawn himself from the little circle.

He, pale, disapproving, was cut to the heart by the look she gave him.

She was last to offer her congratulations. The rest parted to make room for her as she crossed over, her lavender and silver satin skirt trailing behind her, her proud face lifted, smiling. She put her hands on either shoulder of her father and kissed him. It was one of the supreme moments of her life.

Chapter III

COFFEE was served in the drawing-room. The windows which opened like doors on to the verandah were flung wide. It was unusually warm for the season. Countess Polonski, a graceful figure in her crimson gown, played a duet with Mr. Haas on the piano at the further end of the long room. The delicious air, the softly shaded lamps, and the music, cast an entrancing spell over the little group.

"Virginia," asked Mrs. Matthews, "will you please run up-stairs and get me my white lace shawl? I think it's in my lower bureau drawer."

Secretary West, who had a simple and homely taste for the singing of hymns of an evening, was rummaging in the music-rack for a church-hymnal.

La Cerf, too, drew near the piano and leant over one side of it, smoking a cigarette. He had received his early education in a mission school in the West, and he had the unquestioning faith of a child. He loved to attend the Episcopal Church in which he was confirmed.

The ritualistic service had a wonderful fascination for him. He had a habit also of dropping into one of the old Roman Catholic churches in the city, and would sit for an hour at a time steeped in that atmosphere of richness and mystery, watching the shifting sunlight streaming through the stained-glass windows, gazing at the delicately painted statue of the blue-eyed Virgin, surrounded by candles, the perpetual lamp burning in front of her altar. Now he put down his cigarette and joined in the familiar tune to which the countess played the accompaniment. His voice had the vibrant quality of a reed stop in the pipe organ, a nasal, droning sound most offensive to the Secretary. He thought the Indian's voice imparted a barbaric note to the singing, and he was, moreover, physically repelled by him. He never could quite understand how it was that he had him forced upon him in his home and at his table as an equal, but laid the charge vaguely at his daughter's door. He regarded La Cerf in much the same light he did his negro coachman and never shook hands with him.

Prentiss managed to slip unobserved out of the room. His evening's work lay untouched on the study table. As he stepped into the hall, he saw Virginia come tripping down the stairs, an end of the lace shawl trailing after her. He held the door shut for a moment to detain her.

"You look so pretty to-night." He smiled affectionately at her.

"Do I?" she asked, dimpling; "I didn't know. You see—I—I— Well, what I really mean, David, is— Do you think I'm too thin to wear low neck?"

"Not a bit," he answered, his eyes dancing.

The library was across the hall. No one ever occupied it in the evening except himself, and so at night it became his *sanctum sanctorum*. He drew the curtains and lighted the lamp. It was a splendid brass lamp, with a green shade ornamented by a gold dragon. He sat down at the table, and cleared a space among the piles of papers and letters. Then he drew his cloisonne tobacco-jar toward him, and filled his pipe. Mrs. Matthews had brought him the jar from Japan, and he always maintained that it was the source of endless inspiration to him. A pile of letters requiring immediate answers fixed his attention, and he promptly extinguished them beneath the big dictionary. He smoked with quiet enjoyment, his gaze fixed on the books that lined the walls. What splendid companionship, what endless resource was there! He promised himself sometime an evening of leisure, when he should browse among them to his heart's content. He had been too close a student to have time for random reading. In the further corner of the room stood the pedestal which held the

life-size marble bust of the Secretary. On the other side of the room was the chair which had been Virginia's when he heard her lessons, at the request of her uncle, who believed in a classical education for girls, under tutors at home. Portia's instruction had been given in this fashion, although her father's income at that time was so small that he had taught her himself. But Virginia suddenly blossomed into womanhood, and refused to study longer, so that Prentiss's relation to her as tutor lasted less than six months. Yet the impression her personality had made on him was so strong that often of an evening he looked up from his books half-expectant of her companionship. He could evoke her image at will,—the lace at her little throat, her grave, attentive face, the impatient tapping of her slippered foot if the lesson seemed too long. He remembered particularly the pale blue bow she sometimes wore in her brown hair. And if his fancy so tricked him that the sudden realisation of her absence brought its sting of disappointment, he was at once consoled by the consciousness of her presence under the same roof with him. After a little, he drew the manuscript of his play from the drawer, and also several small objects,—an old paper-weight, a tiny bottle, a paste-jar, a little Chinese idol, and some images in wood which he had whittled out himself. They looked much

like the wooden figures in a child's Noah's ark, and he bestowed upon them the various names of his heroines. The other articles had acquired a masculine significance by having stood for the men in his plays. As he worked, his face lost its wearied look and glowed with mental excitement. He wrote slowly at first, then more rapidly, until at last his pen moved almost feverishly across the paper. Now and then he paused to shift the positions of the tiny objects on the table's mimic stage, or to refill his pipe. It was half-past eleven when he paused exhausted. He numbered the pages he had written, but did not attempt to read them over. He knew that he had done good work; that when he came to revise it, he would be surprised at its excellence. But now that the mood of inspiration had passed, he felt weary and indifferent. He removed his glasses, and passed his hand across his eyes. He turned down the lamp-light, but first brought the letters forth from under the dictionary, and put them in a conspicuous position. Later he would answer them, after a short walk in the open air.

To his surprise, he found Mrs. Matthews on the verandah. She was rocking gently to and fro in a large wicker chair, her hands clasped behind her head, as she watched the moon now low in the west.

"We are going to have a change in the weather," she remarked. "There's a ring around the moon. Take off your bonnet," she added, "and sit down."

"My bonnet," he echoed. "Oh!" He drew off his green eye-shade hastily. Portia had a way of making him feel absurd.

She laughed.

"I forgot I had it on," he explained. He drew up a chair. "What has become of our friends?"

"They went home some time ago," she answered. "Father, the general, and Virginia have all gone to bed."

"Why isn't Polonski ever with his wife? I hate to see a married woman so—well, so independent. I'd never allow it in my wife," remarked Prentiss.

"Poor Katrina! I'm sure it isn't her fault. She can't keep herself shut up like a nun because her husband eschews society and spends most of his time at his club. I didn't count on him to-night, although I invited him. You know he never goes anywhere unless it's strictly official. What do you think of Senator Chadwick?"

"He has the finest voice I ever heard," he answered; "but I don't like him. He's too calculating. I think he tries to make you feel that your tact and woman's wit, as well as his admiration for you, have influenced him

to work for your father. But in his heart I don't believe he cares a jot what your opinion of him is. He's too cold to be vain. He's all ambition. He doesn't care for women. He sees a big opportunity for himself if your father's elected. He'll get the credit of making our next President."

"I think you're only half right," she answered. "Remember I see him from a woman's standpoint. He's so clever that he seems cold. But he isn't so really, and he enjoys women's society. They aren't as rough as men!" She laughed. "And vain! Do you think that he didn't know that he was making an impression when he came in late to dinner and announced how the committee stood? Wasn't that a direct bid for admiration? Do you think he would have wasted such an effective entrance on men?"

She drew the filmy lace shawl close about her. She was like some fair goddess in the moonlight.

Prentiss made a vague wide gesture that seemed to include both her and the lovely night, as he asked, abruptly: "Why aren't our lives more like this? Why is it life cheapens people so? We lose our genius. I had higher ideals, more inspiration, ten years ago than now. If we commence life by pulling with the current, we end by drifting with it. We were meant to be immortals, and we

turn out to be magpies! I forget who said that, but it's true. And I'm beginning to find that habits of material comfort grow on me. I take my first swallow of coffee suspiciously like an epicure, and I'm miserable if I go out to dinner and my barbarous host fails to invite me to smoke. Moreover, I find myself of late taking an interest in gossip!"

"Oh, I love gossip," cried Mrs. Matthews, merrily. "I welcome the veriest tittle-tattle. My regret is that I don't dare indulge in it except with Katrina Polonski. We all like to talk about people, not maliciously, by any manner of means, but because our common humanity makes them interesting. We wonder and compare notes with our intimates, but make a fine and decent pretence of being interested only in books when with people we're not sure of. But when you say life cheapens us it isn't entirely true. At least you and I know father." The only love she knew which carried with it a touch of passionate feeling spoke now in her eyes and voice.

"Oh, he's an immortal!" said Prentiss. "That is because his mind is like some great, white, cool gallery filled with statues. But the most of us have minds like toy-shops crowded with tin whistles and wooden animals. He is marble, but the rest of us are putty, and take the impress of every finger touch. If we only —"

"Look at the moon, now," she interrupted.

It was sinking behind the distant woods, large and yellow, a disc of gold. They watched it, until at last only its upper rim was to be seen, and its last gleam was withdrawn from the river.

"How the night affects one's imagination," he rejoined. "The moon shining on the river, the black trees, hold a suggestion of wildness. It is all I need to see at once an Indian in his canoe and to forget that they were driven away a hundred years ago."

"We still have La Cerf," she said, and laughed at his impatient gesture. She rose.

"Good night," she said. "Good night, beautiful night." She stood a moment against the column of the verandah. "Nature alone makes me sentimental, David. I have been in love with this day and evening. You ought to go to bed. I thought you looked tired."

She went up-stairs. As she turned to go to her own room she noticed a crack of light beneath her father's door. She tapped. "May I come in?"

"Yes, my dear," answered the Secretary. He was reading in bed, and now looked up at her benevolently over his spectacles.

The rocking-chair in which she seated herself was old-fashioned, with a twisted rope bottom and a worn black cushion embroidered in bright crewels. The rest of the furniture in the room

corresponded to the chair. The floor was covered by a worn rag carpet. The mirror above the marble-topped bureau was dim and marred. There were several time-stained, gilt-framed engravings on the walls, the Secretary's diploma of graduation from an obscure Western college, and a picture of Portia as a little girl in a plaid frock and embroidered pantalettes, one chubby hand negligently hanging over the arm of her chair to display a turquoise ring. The wash-stand, marble-topped to correspond to the bureau, held the only lovely thing in the room, a china set. Both the delicate bowl and pitcher were cracked and chipped, and of the smaller pieces there remained only the cup and soap-dish. The thin white china was decorated with brown medallions of the head of Minerva surmounted by gold bands, two heads each on the bowl and pitcher, but only a single smaller medallion on the cup and soap-dish. His affection for this set was peculiarly child-like. It afforded him the most innocent enjoyment. The delicacy of the gold-banded china, the perfect profile of Minerva, the association of it with the limpid coolness of his morning bath, seemed to express the beauty and clearness of the Homeric age. His plain room was a refuge to him when the luxury of the rest of the house became oppressive to his simple taste. On the mantel was a daguerreotype of his wife. Virginia looked like her.

Of late years Mrs. Matthews never looked at that faded, evanescent likeness without the faces of two other women rising in her mind. But for her intervention her mother would have had a successor. The first of these probabilities was a widow, and Portia, on learning of her father's infatuation, arranged for the lady to visit them at once. She remained a month, and left with tearful, incoherent accusations of her triumphant hostess and scorn for her backward suitor, who failed to follow his early admiration with a proposal for her hand and heart. She had not stood comparison with his daughter. The next lady on whom he fixed his matrimonial eye was a clerk in his office, an ineffectual, sweet-faced woman with a nervous, repressed manner, who was more awed than attracted by his courtly attention, but would have married him through sheer lack of power to refuse to do so. She wilted before the imperious daughter, and was on the whole glad to accept a position in New York at a considerable advance of salary that Mrs. Matthews secured and thrust upon her. The affair had never reached the point of an engagement and the Secretary took her departure as a rebuff, too proud to pursue her further, yet really wounded and never understanding through whose means she was offered the new position.

Sometimes when he recalled his long years

of widowhood he left vaguely that fate, through no fault of his, had cheated him of a companion. He was too shy a man to enjoy the fashionable women his daughter drew around him.

"Shall I read this chapter aloud?" he asked. It was his custom to read the New Testament in Greek to keep the language fresh in his mind. Sundays he always carried the well-worn volume to church to follow the lessons.

Now he read aloud, well but slowly, translating into the English. Each was keenly conscious of the other's sympathy in regard to his candidacy, but long reserve made it difficult for them to speak freely. When he finished the chapter he put the book-mark in the place and closed the volume.

"I wish you had kept up your Greek, Portia," he said, "if only for religious purposes. To read in this way makes the Testament more convincing. I feel nearer the source of inspiration and I seem to get a first freshness and beauty. It is like plucking a rose with the dew still on it yourself, and not having it given to you by another person."

"The study required to read with any proficiency puts too many thorns on such a rose for me," she answered, rising. "Shall I blow out the lamp for you and open the window before I go?"

"No, thank you, my dear, I shall read awhile. Good night." He read little, how-

ever, but lay thinking into the morning hours. The lamp began to flicker and he blew out the light, yet still lay awake too content in his new-born hope to wish to sleep. The Presidency seemed already to be within his grasp, and a rushing sense of power intoxicated him. He had none of the pessimist in him, and now no thought of failure dashed his bright dreams. For years he had aspired to that highest official position of America and had always just missed receiving the nomination. He cared nothing for wealth and his personal habits were of the simplest. Although he devoted all his splendid ability to the finances of the nation he was indifferent to his private affairs and gave the management of them to his daughter, insisting upon one thing only, that large sums should be sent to support a widowed sister in the West and to give her sons a college education. In some way she had a quaint innocence and unworldliness of nature. He did not suspect that his splendid home was largely maintained by his son-in-law's money. Outside of his daughter and immediate household he had no affections. He never spoke of his mother, who had been a brilliant woman and devoted to him. He supported her, but went seldom to see her the last years of her life, and never sent his daughter to visit her; nor did he ever express any desire to see the nephews he was educat-

ing. In times of adversity he had been too proud to accept sympathy, and he did not desire it now when there was so fair a chance that he would attain to his ambition. He felt no loneliness in his old-fashioned room, surrounded by the furniture so endeared by association, and with his books, his best companions, on the table beside his bed.

Chapter IV

THE day opened with clouds and a sharp wind.

Secretary West welcomed the change with the exuberance of one who had spent his youth in the country and learned to love and know Nature in her every mood. After breakfast he tucked Virginia's hand under his arm, and the two set off ahead of the carriage which was to take him to his office. It was hard walking on the rough road, and the strong gale buffeted them, blowing her hair and bringing a lovely colour to her face.

"If I were younger," said he, "I would run a race with you."

"Oh, you're young enough, Uncle Phineas," she retorted, "but you think it wouldn't be dignified."

He smiled down fondly on her. Virginia had been his darling from the moment she first crossed his threshold, a mere slip of a girl, her parents dead, to make her home with him. She was his wife's niece, and he fancied in her an even stronger resemblance than there was to his early love.

"When you get to be President I hope you'll give lots of balls and let me come to all the dinners, although I suppose I must do just as Portia says. She thinks I'm a child. Why, she called after me this morning to know if I had my rubbers on."

"Did you?" he asked.

She shook her head laughing. "I went back and put them on. It must have rained hard early this morning."

They had walked half a mile before the carriage overtook them. Prentiss sat on the back seat, the fur robe drawn well about him.

"I wish I had your constitution," he said as the great man glowing from his walk got in beside him.

"Virginia," commanded the Secretary, "run right home."

"I will," she nodded, tucking in a loose corner of the robe. "Good-bye. Don't work too hard, Uncle Phineas. Yes, I'm going right home."

"Don't you believe her," cried Prentiss, "she hasn't the least intention of going home. She's going to cut across the fields to the gypsies' camp."

Virginia made a face at him. "You look like a squirrel, David, huddled up in all that fur. Your nose looks so sharp."

"You may not find them, anyway," he warned her, "for Portia started out with blood

in her eye just as I left the house. The chicken-coop was raided last night."

The Secretary laughed. "I thought she'd start out early. She looks forward to their coming every year. She enjoys the fray. Good morning, my dear."

Where the road curved a short distance ahead Prentiss turned to look back for a last glimpse of Virginia.

Such a slender, wind-blown figure against the bleak landscape as it took its way across the stubble fields!

"And that's going straight home," he laughed, settling back comfortably in his corner.

He glanced at his companion and was alarmed by the subtle change in his face. The healthy red tone occasioned by the walk had gone and he looked harassed.

"What is it, sir?" asked Prentiss.

The other laid his hand heavily on the young man's knee. "I had a bad hour last night. I did not get to sleep till morning, and it may have been the excitement, but I woke suddenly in a cold perspiration." He struck his great chest. "A sense of suffocation here. Never mention this to Portia, but I have a growing dread of paralysis. It is in my family on both sides. We all go that way."

"Sir," answered Prentiss, with his charming and merry smile, "were your wife living she

would doubtless wonder, as I have heard all women do, why men invariably exaggerate their little ills. She would say, perhaps, that it was a long step for imagination to take from an attack of indigestion to paralysis."

"Of course, of course, it was nothing," put in West, hurriedly, a trifle shamefaced. They rode some distance before he spoke again. "You understand I shall not become a candidate unless Ohio prefers me."

"I wouldn't let that fact decide me," rejoined Prentiss, easily. "You know a prophet is never without honour save in his own country. You might lose your own State but gain a majority of the others."

The look of pride he knew so well settled upon the other's face. In spite of his eagerness to win that great prize, which had always eluded him and for which he had made long preparation, West would not be willing to sacrifice his pride. He had almost too strong a sense of what was due him and had a conscious virtue which irritated the ordinary voter. Prentiss, who had been with him when he was governor, had had many hints of his unpopularity, and was convinced that West stood a better chance of winning outside than in his own State. His splendid and fearless championship of the negro had given him a national reputation.

"However," continued the Secretary, "even

if I am not nominated, I pray we may have a man of force and decision in the chair. I have no doubt that if the President is reelected, the war will drag on for the next four years. Always ready to accept compromises, willing to change his policy a hundred times to suit any temporary need that arises, he will end by plunging the country into such debt that the burden will become too heavy to be borne. The public debt is now so heavy that I tremble. It is draining the country. And, mark me, David, if the system of finance I have introduced does not continue under wise direction, I am positive it will cause us more trouble in time of peace than it has helped us in the hours of war."

He folded his arms upon his breast, a position habitual with him. "Oh, that I could but see my country once more at peace!" he cried, in a tone of deep feeling. "There is no calamity equal to that which civil war brings. It is brother against brother!"

They were passing through a negro settlement on the outskirts of the city. A sentry recognised Secretary West, and saluted him.

Washington presented a gloomy aspect. The once drowsy old Southern town was transformed into a city of barracks and hospitals. The roads, cut deep by heavy wagons, were now muddy thoroughfares. The autumn trees, the brown and dying grass in the parks,

added a touch of decay. But there yet lingered, in spite of the desolate conditions incident to war, much of the charm and aristocracy which made old Washington. On one of the public benches an old negro and his wife, who had escaped from slavery, sat shivering, huddled together in dumb misery, forlorn in a strange city, eyeing eagerly each passer-by, in the hope of enlisting some attention.

Prentiss caught sight of them, and understood at once their situation. He ordered the coachman to stop a moment, while he directed them to a refuge for escaped slaves, which some good women had organised, and the roof of whose building he pointed out.

At a cross-roads the carriage was again stopped until several artillery wagons had passed.

As they drove on, after the passing of the artillery wagons, two gallant rebel officers on parole recognised the Secretary, and saluted as they galloped by. But he ignored their salutation, his arms folded on his breast, his face adamant in its coldness. When they had passed, he turned to his companion. "I do not recognise traitors."

Prentiss, who had some slight pleasant acquaintance with the two officers, and had returned their bow cordially, flushed.

The next moment the Secretary ordered the coachman to draw up to the side of the road.

"My man," he called to a blue-coated soldier, who hung over rather than leant against the iron fence of a private residence, "what are you doing there?"

The man raised a ghastly face, hollow-cheeked, accentuated by a scraggy beard. His sunken eyes showed like great holes burnt in his head.

"I'm taking a morning constitutional," he answered, with a grin. "Been trying to find the hospital. Been walking around all night. Fast as one person told me which way I'd start off, then it'd all go back on me, and I'd forget the direction."

"Get in the front seat," said the Secretary, "and we'll take you there at once."

But the poor fellow hung weakly to the fence. The ten or twelve feet between him and the road might have been as many miles for all his strength to traverse them unaided.

"I'll have to carry this here fence along for a cane, I guess, seeing as you ain't got a life-line handy," he feebly jested.

Prentiss hurriedly alighted to assist him. He was weak as a baby, and they had some difficulty getting him up into the seat. Despite his exhaustion and momentary collapse, he showed a naïve and eager interest in the city, asking questions in regard to the buildings they passed. He wore the sugar-loaf hat

and blue blouse of the regiments drawn from the West. This was the first time he had seen the capital.

"I'll be able to get around in a few days to investigate if you fellers are running the government on the square," he told the Secretary jovially. Prentiss, thinking it might interest him, had informed him of West's official position. He found himself greatly amused by the soldier's shrewd and humourous observations, and promised to come and take him for a walk as soon as he was convalescent.

The negro coachman showed as much interest as he deemed consistent with the family he served. He modelled his manner as far as possible after that of his master. But he drove slowly, avoiding the rough places, and involuntarily uttered crooning sounds of pity.

"Ef yo'd get a piece o' fat pine outen de swamp, an' cook, an' cook, an' cook it in a kettle o' water till de top am all grease," he volunteered, "an' den put that scum on yo', de misery in yo' back would soon be clean drew out."

The soldier gave him a friendly poke with his weak forefinger. "What're you giving us, you black ace? Do you want to raise a blister on my back?"

Prentiss laughed out like a boy, and slapped his knee. "Never mind, Uncle Joe," he said to the offended old coachman. "I know

fat pine fixed me up once when I had the misery !”

Secretary West, looking straight ahead of him, was oblivious to this conversation. He acknowledged absently the soldier's thanks when they left him at the hospital, and ten minutes later, had he chanced to see the man again, he would not have known him. His manner, so cold as to be repellent, conveyed the impression that his kindness had been inspired by a sense of duty rather than by sympathy.

Prentiss sighed. It required so little to convert such a man as they had just left into a friend. The vote of the soldiers would carry the country, yet he saw that West had puzzled and subtly antagonised the man he had aided. He was no politician, although a great statesman.

His eyes were set in a gaze far-reaching and deeply sad. He was thinking, not of the one soldier, but of the type he represented, the thousands of plucky Americans left on the field to die, or sharing his fate in many a hospital. He had a mind of singular purity and justice. These qualities won him universal honour. But he who was stimulated to the most arduous duties by lofty patriotism, who had such sympathy with the cause and for the American people at large, had no power of quick and kindly sympathy nor saving grace

of humour to bring him into closer touch with his fellow man.

There was something remote, something classical, in his nature. Absorbed in great affairs, he had no patience for ordinary joys or common griefs. He took always the larger view, and failed to see the smaller claims at his very feet.

The sun broke through the gray sky. Like magic it touched the city into life and colour. And suddenly, for all the world as if she had been the good fairy to occasion this change, they saw the Countess Polonski waving her hand to them from the sidewalk. She was going to market with her servant. The gesture of fellowship, her dark and friendly eyes, her bright smile even at that distance seemed yet to carry over from the past night her warm congratulations.

The Secretary returned her bow with more earnestness in his expression than he knew, and his eyes lingered on her in that momentary passing.

A band turned around the corner playing the national tune, and back of it came hobbling, faltering, the stronger supporting the weaker, a grim procession of the slightly wounded soldiers from a recent battle. They had just come up by boat from Alexandria, and had been met at the landing by a band to conduct them to the hospital.

The music drew the crowd at once. Boys appeared, and came running down the street to follow the soldiers. The gold lace on the uniforms of several officers off duty sparkled in the sunlight as they loitered down the avenue.

Secretary West forgot the passing show. He scarcely heard the music. He was looking at the dome of the Capitol, now almost finished. During the war it had been the President's wish that the work of building it should go steadily forward, even in those black days when it was not certain that Washington was safe. The figures of the workmen were to be seen moving to and fro on the scaffolding. Massive stones, as yet unused, were scattered about the grounds. Above the wings of the building floated the flags. Both Houses were in session.

In his public office room at the Treasury Building, he found Senator Chadwick reading the morning paper. He had been waiting some time.

Chapter V

THE short December day made the drawing-room seem dark, although it was only four o'clock. Large flakes of snow whitened the window-panes.

Mrs. Matthews was making tea before the open fire for herself and Countess Polonski.

"I admit," she was saying, "that those old days have a decided fascination for me. I wish I had seen Washington drive to Congress in his pumpkin-coloured coach and prancing horses to deliver his messages by word of mouth like a king. We're no longer picturesque! Our present executive sends his messages, and stays at home with his stockinged feet propped up on the mantel, reading Petroleum V. Nasby! No, I take back that word 'stockinged.' It was a flourish of my own imagination."

"Washington is the place where one might create a court," remarked her companion.

"I don't like the word 'court,'" answered Portia. "It isn't American. Still, I feel as if Washington should be made the capital in the best sense. At present we have only the

political and diplomatic sets, and a few old families who make society provincial and dull. I am always so amused at the peculiar airs these old-fashioned exclusive people put on, as if, because they were the social leaders in the past they must necessarily be superior to us who do the same thing in the present. It's all egotism. We always glorify our own past. Why, I always look at children, for instance, with a kind of pity. I'm so sure they can't have as good a time as I had."

"Ah," sighed her friend. "I never like to think of my childhood. I was so unhappy." Children are so ridiculous. They take their little griefs as though they were tragedies. I once wrote a history, and my father burned it in the fire."

"You should have had my father," rejoined Portia. "He taught me nearly all I know. It was a reminiscence of those days when he was a country school-teacher and received his pay in board at the different farmhouses. I have always longed to visit those places and see the little schoolhouse, and yet whenever it has come in my way to travel I have always smothered the wish and gone abroad as if it were a religious duty! And the more I have seen of the world the more I have hoped that Washington may become the great centre of art. We should have here our best, and by that I mean our most inspiring and polished so-

ciety, whose influence should be felt by the men who come here to Congress and by them transmitted to the people of their districts. It would be a general leavening of the whole loaf. I have a kind of screaming patriotism that makes me hate to admit American faults, but I have felt we could have rather more elegance and dignity without destroying our republican traditions or interfering with the national sense of humour. We care too little for art and too much for money."

"Why don't you devote your money to buying masterpieces and putting them in country schoolhouses?" asked Countess Polonski, wickedly.

"Don't!" said Portia, with a comical shudder. "Now that I have money I couldn't exist with a dollar less." She rose to pour herself out another cup of tea. "Will you have some more?"

Her guest put her cup and saucer on the low bamboo table. "Not any more, thank you." She looked at her friend with thoughtful, half-smiling affection. The countess was most beautiful when animated. In repose she had a thoughtful, strangely patient look that deprived her of her usual brilliancy.

"Katrina," spoke Mrs. Matthews, impulsively, as she met her glance, "I love you. You stir my heart-strings! You are the only intimate friend I ever had." She sat down

again, and stirred her tea thoughtfully. "I often wish that I could with propriety be my father's manager. I should like nothing better than to attend conventions and make my own combinations. What is your impression of Senator Chadwick? Do you think he's a safe man? Do I place too much confidence in his judgment?"

"I like him," answered the countess. "I did the moment I saw him. He is as gentle as a white kitten, although he seems to be a man of ability. And his voice! It is exquisite."

"They call him the silver-tongued," said Portia, "but I am very sure he wouldn't be flattered by your comparison of him to a kitten."

"A woman never tells a man her real opinion of him," replied the Russian, laughing. "Now I always tell the count how gentle he is. Brute!"

"Aren't you afraid he might strike you?" asked Portia. "I've always been positive that foreigners beat their wives, and I'm not open to any other conviction on the subject."

The other's eyes sparkled with malicious delight. "Afraid of him! Ah, my dear, he would not beat me. I am a hyena!"

The servant opened the door and announced Senator Chadwick.

"We were just speaking of you," said Mrs.

Matthews as she shook hands with him. "Countess Polonski was comparing you to a lion or to some member of that genus. Such it is to be a power in the Senate. You will have a cup of tea?"

"I should enjoy nothing more," he answered, taking off his overcoat. "I abominate tea taken as a regular beverage at meal-time, but there is nothing I like better with a friend occasionally." He sat down in front of the fire and extended his thin, white hands to the blaze. "You don't know how cheerful this seems. The air is raw. I shivered all the way out in spite of a closed carriage and a robe."

"Perhaps you would rather have some wine," she suggested. She stooped down between him and Countess Polonski to hang the little brightly gleaming brass kettle on the crane above the coals. "I want you to notice my kettle, Mr. Chadwick. It is so sturdy and jolly I call it 'her,' such is my affection for it, and I've named 'her' Miss Moffatt after one of my nursery heroines. Now, sha'n't I get some wine?"

"I really prefer the tea," he answered. "Shall I tell you a secret? This firelight makes one grow confidential." He regarded them smilingly. "Well, I detest wine. It makes me ill. But I drink it occasionally, a martyr to principle."

"Why, principle?" inquired Mrs. Matthews.

He raised his brows in comic despair. "I've always felt that a gentleman should be able to drink wine. The world respects a prohibitionist. He denies himself on principle. But a man whom the very odour of wine sickens, what a Miss Nancy! And I'm such a man. The idea of wine appeals so to me. It is poetical, and, taken delicately, is suggestive of the pleasantest things in life. What is a marriage or banquet without it? Nor could you conceive of a great poet as a Blue Ribbon Prohibitionist, — Shakespeare, for instance."

"Be consoled," said Mrs. Matthews, "my father dislikes wine and seldom touches it. He has written verses on classical subjects. And may I not add with becoming modesty that he is a man of breeding? I'm going to leave you both a few minutes while I go to get some of my fruit-cake. I never trust the servants to cut it. They might eat the crumbs! It is worth its weight in gold."

Senator Chadwick was not feeling well. He leant back in the comfortable chair, and thought of his forlorn hotel room. How homelike it was here. The arrangement of the pictures and furniture, the scent of the drooping roses on the mantel, the fresh disorder of some bundles left on the piano, all breathed the impression of a ruling and gracious femininity.

"You are tired," spoke Countess Polonski. He met her kind and sympathetic glance.

He straightened himself briskly. "The warmth made me a trifle drowsy." Then quite unconsciously he settled back again in the chair. He was not a robust man.

Countess Polonski often wished that she did not feel so keenly the pathetic quality in others. Chadwick, with his ceaseless personal ambition, his provincial experience, his physical delicacy of organism emphasised by his blond colouring, touched her sympathies.

Virginia's kitten had strayed in the door Mrs. Matthews had left partly open. The little creature rubbed itself against her dress, purring to attract attention, and she bent and picked it up.

It was dark in the long room. The window-panes were quite white with the damp, clinging snow. The Russian's personality seemed to absorb the firelight, so rich and warmly glowing did she appear. Her cheeks were crimson, her eyes dusky as her heavy hair. The jewels on the white hand stroking the kitten glittered. The fur that trimmed her deep blue gown took on a lustrous gleam in the dancing light. The cat's watchful, green eyes, like living jewels themselves, blinking sleepily, were fixed on the fire.

To Chadwick his companion was all that was mysterious, foreign, subtly fascinating.

He thought with distaste of the girls he had known in his Western town. In the silence he could hear the slumberous purr of the kitten, the feathery, lapping sound of the flames, the singing of the little kettle when the water began to boil. At intervals the low wind rattled the casements, and a curious elation arose in him as though the wind were an enemy held at bay while he was shut in with beauty.

"How quiet we are," she said.

He did not answer, and she saw that he was so absorbed in looking at her that he did not regard her words.

Mrs. Matthews entered with a silver tray of cake and preserves. She made the tea in the quaint old china pot. "Has any one seen the Haases lately?" she asked.

"I was there yesterday," answered Countess Polonski. "She was illuminating a volume of German poems for her husband's Christmas gift."

"She thinks the sun rises and sets in him," remarked Mrs. Matthews, "and really he is very patient with her."

Chadwick's sensitive brows drew together. "I don't know why a man should be patient of his wife's devotion to him. It should make him humble."

Her gay laugh rippled out. "But an excess of devotion must bore one so. I was once tempted to marry an admirable man with

a title, but was deterred by the fact that he was in love with me. I foresaw I should have him for ever at my heels."

Countess Polonski rose and gathered up her bundles from the piano. "You should have been shopping with us this morning, Senator Chadwick. We visited all the old pawn-shops and junk-places. I picked up this little cameo." She held it out to him in its shabby case.

He admired it as in duty bound, wondering why she should prefer such an old-fashioned piece of jewelry to a modern, well-set piece. "Why, it is worn so smooth," he added, "that the head on it hasn't any nose. It would distress me to have to wear such a thing. Besides, I don't think it's safe to buy such second-hand things; they might carry disease."

"Oh, I like you American men so!" she cried. "You leave the æsthetic side of life to your women. It is a theory of mine that when the men of a nation get to be connoisseurs their country is becoming effete. If you knew anything about cameos —"

"I do," he interrupted; "my mother had a set she used to wear to church, a large pin and earrings with a snow-scene design. The colours were brown and white, quite tasty."

"My mother had a set, too," said Mrs. Matthews, smiling.

"I see you don't appreciate the exquisite

green of this stone," remarked the countess, shutting up the case. "You must give this string of coral beads to your cousin for me, Portia. They are the proper jewelry for a young girl. I am going now because I am sure you two want to talk together. Where is my muff? Oh, there it is. Tell Virginia that if she will let me have that pretty kitten, I will give her my muff in exchange. And it is really the more beautiful piece of fur. The count is a connoisseur in furs and cameos!"

Senator Chadwick remained an hour longer in earnest conversation with Mrs. Matthews. He was distressed by her father's persistent refusal to do anything to help himself politically, other than to give his consent to the use of his name. But he had found an ally in the daughter, and he told her frankly whose influence it would be well for them to obtain.

"Then if General Matthews will—" he added.

"We must not take him into our calculations," she interrupted, quickly. "He has no sympathy with my father's ambition."

He sat silent some moments.

"I must admit," he said, at last, speaking slowly, "that I was quite unprepared for this. My committee had counted upon his popularity with the soldiers as a strong card in the event of your father's ultimate nomination. It is certainly most unfortunate. Indeed, to speak

frankly, it must tell against a man should his son-in-law oppose his candidacy to the most honourable position it is in the power of the American people to bestow. Your husband is well liked, and his opposition will give rise to ugly rumours of— Lord knows what! But you can trust the reporters to get up some unsavoury reason. Come, come, Mrs. Matthews, this won't do. You must make him change his mind."

"You must not think he will enter any active campaign against my father," she said. "Only, he will not help him."

"Is this absolute?" he asked.

She nodded. The kitten climbed up on her dress, and she thrust it gently but firmly from her. Still, she reached over to the little tea-table, and poured the remaining cream into a saucer, and placed it on the rug. She was not fond of cats, but her innate sense of justice made her respect Virginia's love for her pet. Her affection and understanding of her cousin was not deep, and she sometimes thought of her as not unlike the kitten, content as long as cream was being poured into her saucer.

"I never yet knew a military man of any ability who wasn't both obstinate and opinionated," Chadwick remarked. "It is probably quite useless to try to make him change his mind. Rather ridiculous, though, isn't it? With his father-in-law President, he could have

almost any position. Don't worry, Mrs. Matthews, I understand that the best of husbands are often obdurate. But we'll pull through without him," cheerfully. "I'll see which of us is the better man. I guess I'll win out in this fight, all right." He rose. "I must go. And, in regard to this little matter, I judge, from what you say, that the general will not advertise his opposition, for your sake. But we must be discreet and not let it get abroad, for people on the outside will judge, most naturally, that your husband is loyal to your father."

When he was gone she stirred the fire and drew her chair closer, glad to be alone.

"At this moment I'm not sure which irritates me most, Tom for his absurd enthusiasm, or Senator Chadwick for his impertinence," she thought with vexation. But she was not, on the whole, seriously worried in regard to her husband's attitude. She was so accustomed to act without consulting him, that she underestimated the value of his opinions. She was convinced that her father's nomination would be assured should his campaign receive the right management. Discontent with the existing administration flourished in Washington, where public men were generally ill-disposed toward the government. She knew the political conditions intimately, and was aware that there were few members in either house who fa-

voured the President's renomination. In him they had found no fellow politician, but a master. They had learned the inexorable will beneath that kindly and humourous exterior. Secretary West himself complained openly that there was no true coöperation, and that the President never advised with his Cabinet, that he might act upon their united judgment.

Portia turned an ever-ready ear to these complaints from important men, and hoped to turn this discontent to her own advantage. She was the most beautiful woman in Washington. By infinite tact and practically unlimited wealth she had won an extraordinary social eminence. She had attracted to herself the diplomatic body which, bored by the war and the dulness of the entertainments at the executive mansion, had made her home its centre of gaiety. It was an open jest that the mistress of the White House had jealously accused Mrs. Matthews of attending her official receptions, and bearing off the honours. The latter's position had been strong enough to enable her to resent this attitude, and she did not go there again that winter. Society found her recognition the more important, and rallied around her. The situation was unusual. The President was obliged to renounce all but the most perfunctory social duties. The great state dining-room was seldom opened. The weekly

receptions were attended chiefly by strangers who came to look after their sick, by officers and soldiers just from the hospitals, and by lesser politicians with their wives and daughters. These came to shake hands with their loved President, and to assure him eagerly of their loyalty.

These visitors at the capital guessed little of that brilliant inner circle which drew around Mrs. Matthews as about an unthroned but imperious queen. This opportunity had been made for her largely by the war and by the administration of a Western man. The brilliant society of the South had had its day. She and her father were borne in on this great wave of Western ascendancy, and it was to her great personal distinction and to her husband's wealth that their position was due.

Secretary West himself had not the slightest appreciation of his daughter's real power. He was as unconscious of it as he was of the luxury of his home. At the splendid table Portia set he was an abstemious eater. As his physical being comprehended only the plainest living, so intellectually he accepted with genuine simplicity the most complex social relations.

To her he was perfect. She would not have had the least hair of his head changed. What man was more fit to be at the head of the nation? She recalled the hard struggles of his youth, his unblenching championship

of the cause of the negro. Her imagination dwelt lovingly upon these incidents of his career.

Dreaming by the firelight she pictured how he would accept the news of his election should it come. She even fancied his inaugural address, caught the echoes of his words, saw his magnificent head and shoulders towering above the crowd.

“‘And there were giants in those days,’” she murmured.

Chapter VI

VIRGINIA sat at her embroidery, listening to the Secretary read Wordsworth aloud. She drew the scarlet wool in and out of the canvas, her little white hand glancing in the lamplight. She was making a pair of worsted slippers for his Christmas gift, but as he never noticed her sewing, she was confident the gift would come as a surprise. She had grown up in his home, sweet as a flower, with all her Virginian heritage of charm. There was never a more innocent, incorrigible flirt. Men were an endless source of amusement and interest to her, and she often longed for a girl friend with whom she could exchange confidences. She never thought of talking to Portia, who regarded her as a mere child. This separated the two, as well as the fact of money. The Secretary made his niece a monthly allowance which seemed to his simple mind an abundance for a little girl to spend. He never appreciated how much she lacked in the way of dress. Mrs. Matthews's elegant costumes carried out the reputation her husband bore of being one of the wealthiest men in the country, but with the

exception of an occasional gown of which she had tired she never gave anything to her cousin. Matthews, who was a generous man, had not the least idea that his wife neglected to see to it that Virginia had what she wished. The girl's happy heart knew no discontent. She took real pleasure in making over the rich, slightly worn dresses bestowed upon her, for she was an exquisite needlewoman. Mrs. Matthews, who disliked to sew, often had Virginia do fine mending for her, and insisted upon paying for this service, overruling the child's blushing protestations. Virginia, too sensitive to seem to reprove her cousin by refusing to take the money, would put it in the box for the poor at church. The last Sunday, when at church, La Cerf had been a guest in the family pew and had found her places in the prayer-book for her. She had been so happy when they knelt and prayed side by side.

She smiled with pleasure at the recollection. At the time she had been conscious that Prentiss was irritated. Mischievous dimples showed in her face.

"Poor David," she thought, biting off an end of wool, "he certainly does love me." She felt a fine compassion for his state.

"How beautiful that is, my dear," remarked the Secretary. He read over again the favourite passage he had just concluded.

“ ‘She dwelt unknown, and few could know
When Lucy ceased to be ;
But she is in her grave,
And, oh, the difference to me.’ ”

Ashamed of her inattention, she listened. Her sewing, forgotten, fell idly in her lap, and she sat with lightly folded hands, wide eyes, and parted lips.

“Uncle Phineas,” she said, “does Wordsworth sometimes make you very sad? I think that I could even cry right now, but only because it is so sweet.”

He closed the book and took off his spectacles to rest his eyes. He had been reading the poem of “Lucy.” It had been his wife’s name as well.

“ ‘She dwelt among the untrodden ways
Beside the springs of Dove.’ ”

He murmured the words over again.

“Virginia,” he said, “I was thinking to-day that my wife was only three years older than you when she died. She still seems a slip of a girl to me. I have had the strangest fancy as if long ago I had lost a daughter and not a wife. I feel so old now ever to have had so young a wife. Why, Portia is such a woman compared to what her mother was! Lucy’s youth has lost her to me more than the absent years. ‘The springs of Dove.’ In what land are they, I wonder.”

"You make me cry, dear Uncle Phineas," cried Virginia. "You are not old!" She went over and sat on the arm of his chair. "Do you want your little girl to cry? No? Then you must never, never be sad again, because when you are, why then I am, too. Don't you see how it is, Uncle Phineas?" She laughed through her sudden tears. Her soul was April's. "I just happened to think how Portia would have made her mother stand around just the way I have to. Wouldn't it have been funny?"

"I'm afraid so," he sighed. "Poor child, I fear she is too much like me."

"Shall we have a game of chess?" holding her pretty head on one side. "You mustn't be angry if I beat you, for I know I shall."

"Not to-night, my dear. I have some letters to write, and then I am going to bed." He felt in his pocket. "Let me see," smiling indulgently, "haven't I something for you? Here it is. There, that is for you to buy hair-ribbons with."

"Why, I don't wear my hair braided down my back any more! I wear it in a coil with curls, the way Portia does hers." She turned toward him the back of her head that he might see.

"Well, well, do what you like with it, only don't be extravagant." He did not kiss her good-night, for he was not demonstrative.

His daughter had laughingly compared him to that stern Roman, Cato, who said that he gave thanks to Jove when it thundered, for then his timid wife could, with propriety, fly to his arms.

Left alone, Virginia curled up into the arm-chair he had occupied, coaxed her kitten into her lap, and, taking up a new magazine, began to read. She had not turned more than the first page when Mr. La Cerf was announced.

"Are you all alone?" he inquired, as they shook hands. "The night was so disagreeable that I counted on the family being at home. You must excuse my appearance. I rode my pony out from town, and he got me spattered with mud."

"Uncle Phineas and Mr. Prentiss are home, but the rest are away for dinner. I don't believe Mrs. Matthews will stay long, however, for this is the first time the general has been out of an evening since he was ill." She hoped he would not ask to see David.

He had not the least desire to see either her uncle or his private secretary, and was pleased that she did not insist upon calling them. He seated himself in a rocking-chair, and gave the kitten, which leapt upon his knee, a quick, hard slap, that sent it away with a cry some distance.

Virginia ran and picked the little creature up, and petted it. "I am sorry it annoyed

you, but you should have put it down on the floor gently."

He smiled at her, undisturbed. "I hate cats. You should have a dog. If you beat a dog he knows what it's for, but a cat doesn't."

She took up her work, and began to fill in the design, nervously, somewhat disturbed by the incident.

"I like to see any one embroider," he remarked. "I used to help one of the professors in the Indian museum classify the fine moccasins and robes. They were fine specimens of embroidery. Let me try if I can do that." He held out his hand, and she gave him the canvas and a needle threaded with gray wool. He didn't fancy the colour, and insisted upon having another needle threaded with scarlet.

She watched his small brown hand putting in the stitches painstakingly, but he was too restless ever to remain long at the slightest task, and suddenly he doubled the canvas up into a ball, and flung it on the table. "Don't let's sew any more to-night," he said. He edged his chair as near the fire as possible. He suffered much from the cold.

The reddish reflection intensified the copper hue of his skin. His striking profile, oversensitive for an Indian's, suggested the white blood that General Matthews always declared

was in him. His straight black hair, although cut in the fashion of the day, was always in a kind of wild disorder, which distressed him. He was a great dandy, and he brushed his stiff locks until they shone purple as the oiled blue-black braids of a squaw.

Virginia watched him, and felt her heart quicken with strange excitement. To her innocent eyes he looked the haughty prince of a dark, mysterious race. Back of him she imagined the rolling prairies, wonderful sunrises, and nights of star-lit beauty.

She invested him with the romance of many legends. His reserve heightened this interest. He was too well-bred to be questioned as if he were a curiosity, and did not like any one to appear conscious of the fact that he was an Indian.

"The general was mad with me last night, and so I came out this evening to show him I was not angry," he remarked. "He was at me again to go to war, and I told him," his voice rising haughtily, "I told him I would go to any decent war, but that I wouldn't give a cent to fight for those damned niggers."

The pride of his race, the hatred of the red man for the black, spoke in his flashing eyes. In his heart he cherished revenge toward those who had ever mistaken him for a negro.

"I think they are a good deal like poor children," she volunteered, timidly; "that is

what my uncle says. You must never say that before him, or I fear he would not let you come to see us again."

He straightened himself defiantly, ready to leave the house at once. Then the impulse died, as he looked at her, sitting before him in her pink gown, one hand playing with the long string of coral beads she wore, the tiny kitten purring in her lap, her lovely eyes, despite her reproof, fixed on him with that expression of fascination he had encountered often in the faces of other women. How pale and slight she was! She was not worth his effort in coming. But he would remain, for he wished to see General and Mrs. Matthews. A shade of insolence crept into his gaze. He had a sudden distaste for any further conversation with her, and went over and sat down at the piano.

"I hope you are going to play for me," said Virginia, rather wistfully. She feared she had hurt his feelings.

"I will sing you the Apache snake-dance," he answered.

He began to thump the keys with a finger of each hand, and to this sullen minor recitative, which was indescribably dreary, he droned out the guttural words. As he caught the excitement of the song, his figure stiffened, his eyes grew wild, and he stared straight before him as if hypnotised.

Unconsciously she rose, and went over to the piano.

At last he finished, and let his hands fall into his lap. His eyes turned slowly upon Virginia. The pupils were contracted, and had a strange dulness. A tremor ran through her. She tried in vain to look away from him. Gradually the wild light in his face died like a fire going out and his tense figure relaxed. He half rose, tempted to kiss her.

Virginia retreated from the piano, her kitten clasped to her breast, startled, she knew not why.

He smiled and sat down again. "See if you could dance it."

She ran and put the kitten out in the hall, and came back with sudden joyousness. "It would be such fun to learn it." Dancing had been a fine art with Virginia. She knew all the darky movements, and no servant on the place could instruct her further. She took several steps slowly.

Prentiss, working at his play in the library across the hall, heard the music and fidgeted. It recalled his student days and the many times he had heard, on entering his lodging-house, a muffled thumping, and realised that La Cerf was up-stairs at his piano working himself into a frenzy of emotion. The old distaste swept over him now as he listened. At last he rose impatiently, unable to work. He might as

well go in and visit with the family until their guest left.

As he opened the door Virginia ran into him.

"How you startled me, David," she exclaimed.

La Cerf glanced up and nodded, but continued playing. The music was rousing complex emotions in him, and without any reason whatever he longed to be insulting to his former tutor.

Virginia stopped dancing and leant against the wall, smiling at Prentiss. She was very pale.

"What are you doing?" he asked. Wrath strangely mingled with pain and jealousy rose in him.

"I am going to learn the snake-dance," she answered. "I had only just begun when you came in."

La Cerf continued to play. She seemed to struggle to regain her strength as though trying to obey that insistent note.

"You look too tired to dance any more," said Prentiss. He felt that it was an outrage upon her race that the brutal and barbarous music should affect her to such an extent. "By the way," he cried, turning suddenly to La Cerf, "try this note. I think it would give a better effect." He leant over him and struck it. "Isn't that more the impression

you wanted? No, I don't quite get it, either. Just let me have your seat a moment, please. Don't get impatient, Virginia."

The other arose, reluctant and suspicious. He wished to refuse, but his social training had been thorough and he could not remain seated if he wished to show any pretence of graciousness. Moreover, there still lingered between the young men the influence of the old authority the master had over his pupil.

Prentiss played the notes with an improvised variation. "Do you think that's an improvement?" he asked.

"It isn't the same thing," answered Virginia. "I can't dance to that!"

The Indian maintained a sullen silence. He despised Virginia, but he was beginning to hate Prentiss.

"While I'm here," remarked Prentiss, pleasantly, "I want to play you a little thing I composed myself the other night. If you both don't say that it makes you think of shepherds and nymphs dancing on the green meadows I shall be disappointed."

La Cerf frowned. He did not fully understand the reference to the nymphs and shepherds, and he felt that his former tutor was talking above him.

Prentiss played with instinctive breadth and delicacy. He was a natural musician, but his ambition was a literary one.

"This is the music to the words of a little song I have in my play. It is at the end of a tragic scene between husband and wife. They are interrupted by hearing the door-bell ring. He rushes away, and while the servant goes to admit the expected guest she sits down at the piano and sings this song to her own accompaniment. And the curtain goes down on her sitting alone, singing. Do you like the idea of it, Virginia?"

"Very much," she answered. Her face was burning. She felt vaguely shamed. All desire to dance had left her. She resumed her former seat by the table and smoothed out the crumpled canvas.

Prentiss turned around on the piano stool. "Do you remember the time a crowd of us fellows went camping and how we used to sing nights? You were the only one of us who killed a deer, La Cerf. I believe I'll run up-stairs and get those old pictures of the camp, which that travelling photographer took."

While he was gone neither of the two spoke, but looking up she met his sombre gaze. She could not fathom it, yet that vague sense of shame left her and gave place to happiness. She seemed to exist in a dream, wild, sweet, and full of pain. Between the Indian and herself there was a secret, she felt, a mysterious, wonderful consciousness of each

other, and this Prentiss could not touch, nor interrupt.

"I have brought my treasure-box," he cried, returning. He sat down on the rug like a boy.

"I thought only girls kept treasure-boxes," said Virginia, amused. "What is that roll?"

"My diplomas for my Bachelor's degree and my Master's. And this is a cane I got away from a freshman in a rush. And this is a medal I won in a running race. I never did much in that way although I had an exceptional athletic build." He had a wistful desire that she should admire him as a young man and not look upon him as a thin-blooded scholar. "Here are the camp pictures. Here you are, La Cerf, with your deer over your shoulders."

La Cerf took the picture eagerly, his dark face lighting with his brilliant and unsympathetic smile. "I remember, and say, Prentiss, have you forgotten the girl who used to bring the milk? We ought to have a picture of her."

Prentiss nodded. How many hours he had been a forced and wearied listener while the other boasted of his flirtations!

"Why, here is a picture of Portia that I never saw. It must have been taken before she was married," said Virginia, holding out the card to him.

"How beautiful she was," he answered, taking it. "I used to think she had an expression like an angel. Yet there never was any one who had less sentiment about her."

"I want to see, too," said La Cerf, stretching out his hand impatiently. The picture absorbed his entire attention. After a little he rose to go, refusing to remain until General and Mrs. Matthews should return.

Prentiss, putting away his pictures later, could not find the one of Mrs. Matthews.

"It has probably slipped under these papers, or you didn't notice it among the other photographs when you put them back. It'll turn up all right," Virginia assured him. "Let me tie this ribbon around your diplomas, David, a string doesn't look nice."

She took a bit of ribbon from her work-basket and tied it around the parchment in a dainty bow.

He thought she had never been lovelier. She folded up her embroidered apron, and laid it neatly over her sewing on the basket. He handed her her thimble which had dropped on the floor. It was a gold one, and bore her aunt's name, Lucy.

"Poor Uncle Phineas was quite sad to-night when he was reading Wordsworth," she remarked, reminded of the incident by the name. "When he's President I hope he won't have to work so hard." She had made up her

mind to the absolute fact of his ultimate election with a simplicity which irritated Portia.

"You remind me of two lines from Wordsworth," he rejoined, looking up at her with boyish ardour.

" 'The sweetest thing that ever grew,
Beside a human door.' "

He lighted a candle for her, and opened the door into the hall when she was ready to go. She thanked him with a smile of ineffable sweetness, but her eyes had the expression of one dreaming, and she forgot to say good-night. He watched her ascend the broad stairs with her candle and work-basket. What were her thoughts, he wondered? A girl's thoughts, he told himself, and far too sweet for the mind of a man.

Virginia lay awake until nearly dawn, unable to sleep for thinking of La Cerf. Now, she saw him sitting by the fire, with the warm reflection on his handsome profile; now, mounting his horse to ride back to town; again as in the picture, grave and proud, holding the deer over his shoulder. She recalled his mention of the girl who had brought the milk to the camp, and the jealous thought was sharp as a knife. At last she fell asleep, but wakened suddenly, sobbing.

She had dreamed that he was dead.

Chapter VII

FORD'S THEATRE was crowded to standing-room. It was an oddly mingled audience, representing the floating as well as the permanent population of Washington. Army blue was the predominating colour. Fashionable women filled the loges, and made of them so many flower-boxes, variegated nosegays, on either side of the house. Their shoulders had the droop of the prevailing mode; their hair was uniformly parted and in curls, generally loosely tied with a snood of ribbon. Most of these women belonged to the old Washington families, and were Southern in their sympathies.

Officers sat together in groups of two or three in front of the pit and stared freely at the occupants of the boxes. Here and there a representative could be seen with a lobbyist at his elbow, and the eye of suspicion followed every change of expression on both faces. With the call to war had come enormous demands for supplies. The national crisis roused the purest patriotism in the majority, but it brought to the surface the selfishness of the

baser element, whose fingers itched for a share of the plunder.

The War and Navy Departments had been placed virtually in a state of siege by agents of unscrupulous firms, who sought to foist upon the government damaged firearms, bad beef, and mouldy biscuit; by ship-builders and railroad companies seeking their own advancement. In conspicuous seats were two Jews in green and red uniforms, copied after a French regiment. They belonged to a volunteer company organised in New York with secret instructions to buy up cotton in the South. But the United States officers had confiscated the great bales in the name of the government, and the members in the company were obliged to use the money in their pockets to buy themselves out.

It was generally believed that the war was drawing to a close. Hope of success on either side was giving way to a prayer that bloodshed might cease. Intense sectional feeling had become passive in the city which had been the scene of such multitudinous emotion.

The audience differed not so much in kind from that which gathered in the theatre at the beginning of the war, as in the enrichment of bitter experience. The old inhabitants, with Southern sympathies, had ceased to applaud openly the victories of the rebels; the better of the lobbyists, birds of prey though they

were, had, nevertheless, become somewhat subdued by the cry of anguish that went up over the country, even if they felt no doubt of their inherent American right to thrust their fingers into Uncle Sam's pie and draw out the plums.

The soldier who had gone forth a boy issued from the hospital a gaunt man, pathetically cheerful. The statesman who had been confident that the war would last only a few months had grown old under the burden of increasing anxieties.

The orchestra was composed of a Confederate regimental band, which had deserted in a body with its instruments, and was permitted to play Union airs. The people, with the license which a time of war brings, stamped to the music and sang in snatches. Suddenly, "Maryland, my Maryland," was played to wild applause. The faces of the women who wore conspicuously the secession rosette grew pale. Baltimore was occupied by the United States troops. To the victor belongs the spoil, and the Yankees had taken as their right the national music of the South.

By half-past eight the seats were filled and the arrival of the President was awaited impatiently. It had been announced that he would attend the play. The gallery applauded a tall usher by mistake, and laughed good-naturedly at the error. At nine o'clock the

curtain went up with the box still unoccupied. Word was received that he had been detained.

The empty box, richly festooned with silken flags, held a subtle fascination for Mrs. Matthews, and her gaze kept turning to it from the stage where the "Lady of Lyons" was being played.

Count Polonski leant forward and whispered in her ear: "Whom do you see beneath those stars and stripes?"

"I was thinking of my father," she answered, simply.

She looked toward the box again. The fancy that her father was there was instantly dispelled by a sombre, shadowy likeness of the President, an opposing ghost which her own imagination had involuntarily summoned. The illusion was a shock to her, and she looked quickly away.

"Why did you shiver?" asked the count. "Did some one walk over your grave, as the old wives say?"

"Hush," whispered Mrs. Haas, who was intent on the play. She frowned at them both. Her small face, so pale and eerie, overshadowed by her wonderful hair, wore a strained expression. Already the sentiment of the play was beginning to tax her emotions.

"My dear lady," he retorted, "the play is absurd. The real entertainment lies this

side of the footlights." He indicated the audience by a gesture. Her attention was once more absorbed by the drama, and she did not hear him. He smiled and settled back comfortably in his chair. Mrs. Matthews had invited him and his wife to be her guests for the evening. To her surprise he had come alone. A headache confined the countess to her room. Portia guessed that the headache was due to the strain on her eyes occasioned by the count's persistent demand that she should read aloud to him. His own eyesight was deficient. Behind his eyeglasses his light hazel protruding eyes continually contracted and dilated. He now put on a second pair of glasses of powerful lens over the first to enable him to distinguish the faces of the audience. He was a stout man, carrying his head well back. The upper part of his body was so large as to be slightly out of proportion. He had, however, a look of great intellectual distinction which at once conquered in the person who met him for the first time any consciousness of his slightly grotesque figure. At present he was the only man in the party.

General Matthews, after seating his wife and Virginia, had gone to spend an hour at his club. Mr. Haas, whose newspaper duties required most of his evenings, would meet them at supper. Before the close of the first

act the tall usher again entered the Presidential box and laid a bunch of roses, with long, fluttering ribbons, on the railing. It was the signal for renewed applause.

The actors stopped the performance until the Presidential party was seated. A harsh voice shouted some angry criticism of the President, and in a second the offender was lifted from his chair by two indignant soldiers, and carried, cursing and kicking, into the street. At last the cheering ceased, not, however, before several Rebel officers, out on parole, were forced to join in the clapping by catcalls and ominous hisses from the watchful gallery.

On the stage the impassioned Claude Melnotte resumed his wooing of his fair innamorata, asking:

“Dost thou like the picture, Pauline?”

In Mrs. Matthews's box Count Polonski, laughing, repeated in her ear, “Dost thou like the picture, Pauline?”

She was gazing at a lady sitting directly across from her, well forward in her chair, fanning herself energetically as her glance roved over the house.

Portia flushed with annoyance, and looked away.

General Matthews came in at the close of the second act. He appeared in better spirits than for days past. A certain brightness of

expression, the electric sparkle of his eyes, bespoke an inspiring hour with his friends, and an invigorating walk in the crisp winter night.

Polonski watched him with admiration as he stood behind his wife's chair, looking out over the audience. Here was a splendid specimen of the American volunteer soldier. The direct gaze of his shrewd eyes was really attractive, and how perfectly uninteresting he was! The count chuckled. He was never bored; life was always fascinating.

"What aristocrats you are, you army men!" he said. "Now, much as I have enjoyed my evening here, I wish I might have heard you all exchanging your experiences on the field. But no, we civilians are only allowed to admire our heroes from a distance, and to comment respectfully on the missing toe or nose."

Matthews laughed. He liked the Russian.

"Where is Countess Polonski?" he asked.

"She is not well," answered his wife. "Did you see Mr. Haas?"

He did not reply, and, glancing up, she saw that his eyes were fixed on the President. How well she knew that look of loyal devotion! How many times she herself had received it! It seemed almost an indication of stupidity, like the indiscriminating gaze of a wide-eyed, loving child. He

accorded her father's political rival the same look he did her. He bent down.

"Won't you go over with me to speak with the President and his wife? I should like to have you pay your respects to them with me. Never mind her attitude. I don't think the poor woman quite knows what becomes her position. Perhaps you may unwittingly have antagonised her."

His enthusiasm chilled her. She saw he had no thought of her father's ambition and could not appreciate the fact that her feeling toward the President could not be entirely cordial. She resented his primitive masculinity. His instinct was always to assume that his opinion was naturally the more justifiable. But she was too proud to show him that she was wounded, and rose at once.

"Won't you come with us, Virginia?" she asked, drawing her lace wrap about her shoulders. "Count Polonski, we will leave Mrs. Haas in your care. Keep her from throwing her flowers at the actor. I can see she's taken with him."

"Oh, how can you!" protested Mrs. Haas, annoyed.

The three were obliged to pass single file even through the wide aisle at the back of the house, so voluminous were the hoop-skirts of the two ladies. Attention centred on Portia, attracted by her height and fairness. In her

hair she wore a single white camellia. She was too famous a beauty to be made self-conscious by the heads that turned to watch her pass or by audible comments. The absence of admiration alone would have compelled her attention. She was not unlike the French woman who wept for the first time when the street gamins did not stop their play to stare at her lovely face as she passed by.

They reached the official box as several other people were leaving. The President reached out a cordial hand to Matthews.

"Hello, general!" he cried, accompanying the words by so hearty a grip as to split his white glove across the palm. "It strikes me you look pretty well for a sick man. Mother," he added, "here's Mrs. Matthews." His wife bowed formally and sought to emphasise the marked coolness of her greeting by a show of affability toward Virginia, whom she had met before and to whom she had taken a fancy.

"Sit down here beside me, child," she commanded, drawing aside her skirt. While the rest engaged in a general conversation she devoted herself to the young girl, quite turning her back on Portia. She was a small, stout woman, with an expression at once aggressive and timid. She was dressed in the low-necked gown of the Victorian era. It was made of shot-green silk. On her head was a bright wreath of artificial flowers. Her plump arms

were bare to the shoulder. Her pearl-coloured gloves fastened with two buttons at the wrist. She began to talk about dreams, for she was at that time interested in Spiritualism.

"I should think any one would be very unhappy who put faith in dreams," said Virginia, who had struggled hard to overcome the depression left by her own dream of La Cerf.

"There's more in dreams than we know of," rejoined the other. "I had a friend once who was away from home visiting, and one night she dreamed of her grandmother and woke to find her room filled with the odour of clove pinks. She knew the old lady set great store by clove pinks and she could not help taking this as a sign of her death. She also noticed that little blue flames appeared on the bed-spread and then went out. The next day she received word that her grandmother had died that night."

"Oh, I should be afraid to believe in dreams!" cried Virginia. "I should be afraid!"

"You're young," said the lady, "you're young yet. I'm a great believer in omens."

Her poor, worried, discontented face darkened with some secret anxiety, and she sighed heavily. The burden of life in the White House had been too much for her. Her Western ideas of frank hospitality, her natural kindness of impulse, had been misunderstood;

while her personal antipathies, which had been quick and strong, her lack of concealment when offended, had worked against her social success. In Mrs. Matthews she encountered a woman of New England ancestry with a brilliancy and charm that rivalled the Southern women, and with the frank daring of the Westerner. In the very suavity of her courtesy the harassed wife of the President divined a merciless amusement. It was no wonder that she had grown timid and resentful of her own sex.

The girl's compassionate heart divined vaguely the disturbed mind, the shattered nervous system, of her companion. Her extreme youth, her sweet face, appealed to the motherly heart of the older woman.

"Here, child," she said, "have these roses. They're fitter for you than for me. You must come and go out driving with me some day. You don't look any too strong. I suppose you've lots of beaux, though; but don't be in too big a hurry to marry. Take your time."

Virginia shook her head, laughing. The idea of not marrying pleased her. She knew her uncle and Portia would never permit her to marry La Cerf, and so she dreamed of those maiden years which should enshrine his sacred memory. Her companion smiled in sympathy. She would like such a girl as this to become her daughter, but as she remembered the son

who had died the smile faded and she frowned to keep back the tears.

"How very handsome that woman in black velvet is down there next to the pillar," whispered Virginia to her. "I suppose she dresses so plainly in war time because some people think it shows good taste and patriotism. I think black velvet and point lace are so genteel. Nothing is more becoming. And real lace is always so elegant." She was almost ready to pray that her companion would take some hint from what she said. "Yes," she repeated heroically, her shy heart fluttering as she looked steadfastly past the shot-green silk, "there is nothing as elegant as black velvet and point lace."

Portia remained standing, talking to the President. She told him that she would stay but a moment, and it was not worth while sitting down. Others who had gathered to see him talked in the corridor outside. One of these discovered an old friend in Matthews, and buttonholing him, pushed him into a corner. No one thought of hurrying Mrs. Matthews.

The President was very tired. His eyes were sunken deep in his head, and even the mellow light could not soften his ghastly pallor.

"I've had a mighty hard day," he said. "I couldn't seem to get warm even with a big fire in my office, so I went for a stroll in the

sunshine. In a way it did me good, but nothing seems to reach the tired spot." He touched his chest.

"I hope our troops have met with no fresh defeat," she rejoined, anxiously.

He shook his head. "I'm not afraid we won't worry through the war all right. It's that postmastership at Jonesville that's bothering me." There was a twinkle in the cavernous eyes.

She found it difficult to talk with him, not that his wife's attitude embarrassed her, but because she felt in him an intuitive knowledge of her inner self, and knew that she on her side was unable to fathom him.

"I enjoyed the trees on my walk this afternoon," he remarked. "I think I enjoy them best when they are not in leaf. I thought, too, that the shadow of the bare branches on the snow was like the profile of the tree. Did you ever happen to have that thought?"

"I think I have," she answered, smiling, with an unusual impulse of sympathy, so deep was her own love of nature. "But I care more for the trees in budding time. Then you still have the fine tracery, but with a promise added to it."

He was about to answer when he caught sight of a soldier hovering near the door. "Well, my Green Mountain boy," he cried, "when did you get out of the hospital?"

The tall Vermonter was still ill enough to turn white instead of red, when embarrassed.

"I left my best leg, sir, to hold down my place there." He laughed bravely, and shifted his crutches. His right leg was gone at the thigh.

"Good for you," said the President. "Some of our fellows had to leave both legs! Mother, I want you to let that little girl come here. I want her to meet one of our soldiers."

The Vermonter bowed, as yet too unaccustomed to his crutches to risk shaking hands. He was now wrought to such a condition of nervous shyness that the perspiration stood on his forehead, and he nodded abruptly to the President over Virginia's head.

"Good-bye," he said, accompanying the nod by a shining look of perfect devotion. The group of fashionable people waiting to pay their respects parted to allow him to hobble through. He passed back to his seat, conscious, proud, and happy. He had been led by the longing of his homesick heart to speak again to the great man who had visited him in the hospital; to meet again the sympathetic gaze of those sad eyes, which were yet so wise; to feel once more the warm glow of appreciation at the inevitable jest. He settled himself, trembling with weakness, in his seat, and laid his crutches on the floor. He laughed to himself. "He thought it was lucky I didn't

have to leave both legs," he murmured. "Well, I can't say as it wasn't."

The President was saying good evening to Virginia. "Now, my little friend," he added, "you must go to see my boys in the hospitals. A fresh face does them good. We must all do our share while this great trouble lasts."

Mrs. Matthews reached her own box again just as the curtain rose on the third act. She noticed that her hands trembled slightly, and she concealed them under her shawl. She thought of her father at home, absorbed in his work, and he seemed very far away, as though he were indeed not in touch with the actual world. Suppose it passed him by!

"What did that soldier want?" inquired Count Polonski. "We sat over here, and watched humbly while you three hobnobbed with the great; didn't we, Mrs. Haas?"

"Oh, he merely wanted to shake hands with the President," answered Matthews, abstractedly. He divined in his wife a new-born austerity toward himself. His earlier good spirits of the evening died, and he wondered in what he had offended her.

Chapter VIII

AFTER the theatre they went to an unfashionable, old oyster-house, where they were met by Mr. Haas and a friend. The latter was a tall, loosely-jointed man, conspicuously attired in a brown coat, a white waistcoat and puff cravat, and lavender pantaloons. A fringe of whiskers framed a smooth-shaven face of almost infantile blandness. This impression was immediately dispelled, however, by a direct glance from his spectacled eyes, which had the shrewd, blue, merry, innocent look of the immortal boy, into whose soul the greed of money-getting or the baser passions of mankind had never entered.

He was Greenleaf, the editor and proprietor of the *New York Chronicle*, and, as he stood shaking hands with his new acquaintances, he was the one person in the little and able group who possessed the inborn quality of genius.

"I hadn't expected to meet any ladies, to-night," he said, as they seated themselves at the table, "least of all, you, Mrs. Matthews. It's a great pleasure. I declare I was feeling lonely." He stroked his chin, regarding

them the while with a quaint look, humourous, pleased, and irresistible, so that they all smiled.

"Is he laughing at us, I wonder," thought Mrs. Matthews, "or are we laughing at him?"

"I was kind of homesick," he continued, "I declare I was. I miss the rumble of New York. I knew I couldn't sleep, so I was going to write for the rest of the night."

"When I plucked you by the sleeve and took you off with me," finished Haas.

"What will you all have first?" inquired General Matthews, consulting the bill of fare.

"I think we had better have some oysters first," answered his wife, "and, while the rest of you are eating, — I don't care for any myself, — I will mix a salad."

"Ah, you Americans," sighed the count, "how resourceful you are! You almost make us discontented with the women of our own country. And do let us all insist that the landlord of this charming place bring us good coffee. It will really pay to order it freshly made for us. Did I ever tell you how we were driven to housekeeping? We'd found all the hotels to be insufferable, and so went to a boarding-house. How well I remember our first dinner. We sat down to the table at five and finished within a barbarous half-hour. We were told the black coffee would be sent to our room. At eight o'clock the maid was sent up

with it. And I assure you that was as near as that woman ever got two things together."

Greenleaf took a naïve enjoyment in the company. He had seen little of worldly society, and he was delighted to find that these people were neither haughty nor inclined to put on airs. He thought Mrs. Haas difficult to talk to, and wondered if Haas really regarded her as a creature of flesh and blood. But Mrs. Matthews was a woman with whom he felt himself in sympathy at once, and he entered gaily into her laughing anxiety regarding the seasoning of the salad.

"Count Polonski likes plenty of cayenne, but I know Mrs. Haas doesn't. How shall we decide?" she asked.

He drew a coin from his pocket and covered it on the table with his palm.

"Tails he loses, heads he wins. Russia has it!" he cried, exultingly, allying himself with the winning side.

"Don't spoil it for me!" cried Mrs. Haas, indignantly. "Let the count add his own cayenne."

General Matthews and Virginia were both quiet. He was tired, and his wound was beginning to throb, while disappointment at having missed *La Cerf* at the theatre depressed her. She had not seen him for a fortnight, and feared that he might be ill; but a new-born self-consciousness restrained her from inquiring.

"If you are not hungry, Virginia," suggested her cousin, "you might play for us."

Their party was the only one in the room, so she rose and sat down at the shabby square piano without embarrassment. She tried to remember David's song in his play, but failed. Suddenly she began the monotonous striking of two keys.

"Mercy on us!" cried Mrs. Haas. "Do you want to put all our nerves on edge?"

"It's the Apache snake dance," she answered, over her shoulder.

Haas shook his head. "No, no," he said, pursing up his lips. "A young maiden should not play such barbaric music. Let us have 'The Rose and the Nightingale,' Miss Virginia."

Polonski was last to finish his supper. Mrs. Matthews, who, like her father, was an abstemious eater, felt that she could pardon even a greater appetite in the Russian if he only took his food with less deliberate enjoyment.

"Well, Mr. Greenleaf," he remarked, leisurely lighting a cigarette, "are you still on the fence in regard to the presidency?"

Greenleaf put his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, and replied by a wink. Mrs. Matthews laughed with the rest, but with secret misgivings. She knew that Haas had arranged this meeting between her and his

chief in the hope that she might influence the policy of the *Chronicle* to her father's advantage. Its editorials were now devoted solely to criticism of the present administration, and to the exploitation of Greenleaf's theory that the government should buy the slaves from the south and thus end the war. As she saw that the Russian intended to continue the conversation he had begun, she resigned herself to any strained feeling that might ensue. She could be sure of him neither as friend nor foe, and knew that he would be too clever not to see through any attempt on her part to turn the conversation into another channel.

"Speaking merely as an outsider," he went on, "I should say that a change of administration might end the war, provided, of course, that a strong man were pressed into service. Now, why doesn't your paper support —?"

"Whom?" cried Greenleaf, excitedly, ready to down the name at once. But the other shook his head, smiling.

"You foreigners are pretty deep," said the editor, good-naturedly. "But what I want you to understand, Mr. Polonski, is that the next election will prove that the great body of the American people will assert its right not to be ruled by a military despotism. I tell you this because I don't want people abroad to get such false ideas of us."

"You must understand that my interest in

this deplorable war cannot be a personal one," answered the count, gravely, "and that I am therefore in a way unprejudiced. My wife reads your editorials aloud to me every day, and I combat every sentence. It affords me the daily stimulus of a contest with a brilliant foe, and, while I am always worsted in the argument, nevertheless I am unconvinced, and await the next day's issue of your paper to enjoy the taste of battle again."

If his words were calculated to draw forth some expression of opinion from the other, he was not disappointed. Greenleaf, used only to the society of New England women, whose intellectual attitude of mind was such that they never doubted the gallantry of a man if an important discussion caused him to forget their presence, was unaware that he broke any social convention now in commencing a political tirade. He launched forth into a bitter discussion of the administration. They all recognised the excitable tone of the brilliant editorials which had gained his paper national popularity. As he continued, Mrs. Matthews thought she understood for the first time how it was that the farmers, particularly those of the Western States, too far from the scene of activities to appreciate the cares that beset the President, should find satisfaction in the *Chronicle's* confirmation of their suspicions that the party in power was not keeping its promise to bring the

war to a speedy close. And, doubtless, the paper's reiterated prophecy of ultimate ruin to the country afforded them in their depressed condition the nervous relief which even a gloomy excitement brings.

General Matthews was evidently distressed. He did not wish to offend his wife by openly championing the President, nor, on the other hand, could his irritable military spirit bear the conversation with patience.

"We army men are not apt to be good at controversy," he said, "but it strikes me that you newspaper men wield your pens behind our swords."

"Mr. Greenleaf," said Portia, smiling, and laying a hand on his arm as he was about to answer, "you mustn't argue with my husband. Why, I don't dare to do so myself." She rose quickly. "Does any one beside myself realise how outrageously late it is? Tom, please get me my cloak. It's over there on the chair beneath that picture of Niagara Falls. I wonder why it is that all hotels invariably have a hideous painting of the Falls?"

Greenleaf watched her admiringly. The deterring touch of her hand on his arm had been subtly flattering. He felt that it signified their mutual understanding of her husband's lack of power to reason. When he shook hands good night with Matthews he did so indulgently. Patriotism was to him

the chief virtue, and he respected the soldier's outburst even though it amused him.

"You have given me a charming evening, Mrs. Matthews," said Count Polonski. "How delightful that long-legged editor is! I hope he will wink at me again."

"What are you two laughing at?" asked Greenleaf, sauntering toward them, his hands clasp ing his hat behind his back. "What's the joke?"

Mr. Haas, who was fastening his wife's fur cape and tying her lace scarf about her head as though she were a child, bent down and whispered to her.

"Mr. Greenleaf and I are going over to my club for an hour or so," said Count Polonski. "You go our way, too, for a couple of streets, don't you, Haas?"

The four saw General and Mrs. Matthews and Virginia to their carriage. As it was about to start Mrs. Haas dropped her husband's arm, and ran out to the curb.

"Wait a minute, Portia; I want to speak to you!" she called. "Can't you go shopping with me to-morrow, and, Portia —"

"What?" asked Mrs. Matthews, putting her head out of the door.

"I want to speak to you," murmured her friend, standing on tiptoe. "Wilhelm wished me to tell you that Mr. Greenleaf stays over until to-morrow afternoon, and that he will

try to take him for a morning's stroll in the market. It would be well if you happened to run across them."

"Elise, you chatterbox," cried her husband, "are you going to keep us standing here all night?"

Count Polonski and his companion had walked on slowly to the corner. Suddenly the Russian stood still in the light streaming from a drug store, and waved his cane.

"Come," he called, "if you want to see something charming."

A rope had been stretched across the street, and a dancer was performing in mid-air. There was a large crowd of spectators. It was a mild winter night with a full moon. The street lamps stretched away like two rows of stars, and on the tops of opposite buildings red and blue lights were burning. In this strange mingling of lights and the white reflection of the snow, the dancer pirouetted back and forth on the slender rope.

"It's a woman, isn't it?" said the Russian. He put on his second pair of glasses and peered upward.

"What a pretty figure," said Mrs. Matthews. "Tom, can you see?"

"I'm not looking, said Virginia from inside the carriage. "I'm afraid she'll fall."

"You sentimental child!" cried her cousin. "I've a mind to make you look."

"How presumptuous we poor mortals are," spoke the count. "Ordinary insects hide themselves in the flowers when the sun goes down, but it's the human butterfly that dares to flutter and dance unabashed by the solemnity of night. I suppose she doesn't even know the moon is shining; she must be so dazzled by those red and blue bonfires. It's just as I was telling you to-night, Mrs. Haas. We all want our red and blue bonfires. We like the tinsel and colour of the stage, and forget that the audience is more interesting."

"You may feel that way," she answered, "but I don't. I like lovers. When Claude told Pauline of his palatial home I thought of all you had told me, Wilhelm, of your ancestral castle. I hope that won't turn out to be a cottage, as his did. I should die of mortification."

"Wait till I take you back to Germany and you shall see," answered Haas, looking down on her proudly. Was she not some Rhine maiden of his country's lore, with her hair of fairy gold and her elfish face?

"Come on, let's get nearer," said Greenleaf, eager for a frolic.

General Matthews impatiently ordered his coachman to drive on. He had seen his wife's depression vanish when she met the editor. Now he guessed rightly that her renewed good spirits were due to fresh political hope. His

nature was too loyal, as his choice had been too single, to allow him ever to doubt the wisdom of their marriage, but he felt they were drifting apart. She settled herself comfortably in the corner to get some sleep on the way home. The street lamps as they passed them threw vanishing gleams of light on her face, as she sat with closed eyes serenely unconscious of her husband's frowning gaze.

Virginia too was silent, staring out miserably through the window at the white landscape. Her hands were tightly clenched in her lap.

"I want to see him," she repeated, mentally, "I want to see him. That is all I want in the world."

She had never before known what it was to be rebellious. She was angry in a vague and terrible way new to her; angry with life itself that it should deny her the supreme desire of her heart. Although she had spoken lightly of the significance of dreams to the President's wife that evening, her own recent dream of La Cerf's death still terrified her.

They left the city, with its noise, its misery and crowds, its sombre hospitals and the bright gambling-halls, the airy tight-rope dancer, and turned into the country road. On either side the fields stretched away white and still. Portia opened her eyes and looked out at the trees that sped by, at the familiar landmarks shrouded in the mystery of night; the

scattered negro cabins ; an old church ; a stream with its thin covering of ice sparkling in the moonlight.

She stretched out her hand for her husband's. "Isn't it peaceful and lovely after the city? Aren't you glad we live in the country, dear?" Happiness brought out the sweetness of her nature, and she was full of hope for the morrow. "Did you have a nice time, Virginia?"

There was no reply, and she guessed that she was asleep. She leant forward to see that the girl had her cloak wrapped around her and inadvertently touched her cheek. It was warm and wet with tears.

She said nothing, but when she was ready for bed that night she put on a wrapper and went down to Virginia's room with a glass of hot water and wine.

The girl was sitting on the edge of her bed braiding her hair, a slight wistful figure in her white nightgown.

"Drink this now while it's hot. It will settle your nerves," said Portia, taking a seat beside her and smiling cheerily. She was not at all alarmed by Virginia's tears, and laid the cause of them to weariness. "The President took quite a fancy to you, I thought," she continued, hoping to divert her thoughts.

The attempt was successful. For the moment Virginia forgot her disappointment and

turned an earnest face to her cousin. "How sad he was! Oh, Portia, when he spoke so kindly to me I know just how that poor soldier felt toward him, too. But his eyes were so sad that I felt I could even die if doing so would make him look really happy just once."

Her cousin seized her shoulder with a grasp that hurt. "Do you know what you are like?" she asked, sternly. "You are like one of those harps they put in windows, on which every breath of wind plays what tune it will. You have no stability of character, but take on the colour of any one you happen to be with. I am alarmed when I think of your future. I do not know when you may fall under the spell of some bad man. I should like to see you safely married to a man of position and years to-morrow."

Chapter IX

CITY of barracks and hospitals though Washington was during the gloomy days of the war, it still retained one corner of cheerful bustle and confusion. This was the old market down near the Capitol. Here on sunny mornings gentlemen strolled smoking and gossiping. Ladies accompanied by negro servants carrying the baskets did the family marketing. The actors and actresses whom the world had flocked to see the evening before now reversed the position, and watched their last night's audience as though it were the spectacle. Under the shed that ran out over the sidewalk and beyond the market proper sat the humble vendors, the coloured "mammies." Among them was an old couple, gray-haired, black, and wizened, who had bought their freedom and now had an independent business. Their soft voices besought a purchaser in every passer by. Their wares were always humble: eggs and a few chickens, okra, bunches of sassafras, herbs, cakes made of corn meal, and pork. They added whatever wild flowers might be in season, or, if the flowers were

gone, other beauties of the wood, branches of autumn leaves or dried grasses. Now that the Christmas season was approaching, they offered branches of pine, holly, and mistletoe, and strung polished red apples, oranges, and threaded popcorn about their crazy stalls.

Mrs. Matthews was not to be beguiled by their soft blandishments, their artful compliments pitched in a key to reach her ears, and she passed on without stopping.

The day was lovely. She had enjoyed the early drive into town and found herself in the best of spirits. Presently she noticed a group of gentlemen near the fruit stall. They saw her almost at the same moment and bowed.

"Good morning," she said, stopping. "And what are you doing? Unless you are all men of family doing the marketing for your wives I fail to see what moral right you have here."

"Why moral?" asked Admiral Peale.

"Because if you are not here to pick out chickens and select vegetables you are certainly here to gossip. Now, to prove it, I don't believe one of you five would dare to tell me what you were talking about just now."

"Ah, Mrs. Matthews, if I could only convince myself that these other gentlemen would not feel betrayed," cried the admiral, "I would tell you."

"And I! And I!" they cried in turn.

"I am not curious," she retorted. "I merely wanted to prove you all guilty. Let me see, let me see. Which one of you shall I choose to take me to lunch? Not you, Lieutenant Clark. You're so handsome that you'd be thinking of yourself instead of me. As for you, Mr. Ralston, you're so witty and cynical that you'd tempt me to gossip, and we should part feeling uncomfortably suspicious of each other. Admiral Peale, you'd be sure to notice if the table-cloth had a spot. And you, Mr. Haas, are planning to meet your wife, you dear, sentimental German. But I will choose you, Mr. Greenleaf, for our acquaintance has yet all the charm of novelty. Good morning, gentlemen."

She looked back laughing over her shoulder at the other four as she bore away the flattered New Yorker. Her glance, so full of good-fellowship, was irresistible. It was intimate and seemed to admit their knowledge of the reason of her choice. They all felt a thrill of sympathy, a personal devotion to her cause.

"No other woman in Washington can compare with her," said Ralston, pleased with her recognition of him as a wit. He considered himself a social Dean Swift.

"I'm not sure whether her remark to me could be regarded as complimentary or not," commented young Clark. "I've rather wondered why she never invited me to call."

"A little shyness on her part, I suppose," suggested Ralston.

Admiral Peale had followed her with an admiring glance. "Well, I hope she'll pull in Greenleaf. That's the game this morning, isn't it, Haas? He'd make a strong playing card for West. Lord! She has as much spirit as twenty widows. What's this I hear about Matthews being on the outs with his father-in-law?"

Such was Mrs. Matthews's fine air of comradeship as she walked off with him that Greenleaf felt he was not unattractive to the most brilliant and influential woman in Washington. She admired some roses, and he insisted upon getting them for her. He had never bought flowers for a woman before, although he had taken many a garden bouquet to his wife during their courting days. Under most circumstances he would have blamed himself now for extravagance. He had long curtailed his personal expenses by the conscientious query: "Do I really need this? Can I do without it?"

His companion received the roses with such pleasure, and so enjoyed their odour and colour, that he was charmed with his own power to please. She selected one perfect pink bud and drew its stem through his buttonhole.

"Mrs. Matthews," he said, his humourous

mouth twitching, "you make me feel what a plain, blunt man I am."

They found the little lunch-room at the back of the market unoccupied and seated themselves at one of the small tables.

She drew off her gloves and smoothed out the fingers with habitual nicety. Her face was grave and her eyes downcast.

He watched her shrewdly from behind his spectacles. She attracted him, but distinct from this personal liking was his pride in her as his countrywoman. Here was no little nature to be offended by frankness on his part. He felt a generous impulse to open the subject of which they were both conscious. There was a touch of genius about the man which had long made him a privileged character. People felt at once his entire genuineness, his utter lack of malice. His quaint shrewdness was guileless.

"Mrs. Matthews," he said, "I always did hate beating about the bush, and I'm going to strike out from the shoulder, so to speak. You see I have to keep my finger on the public pulse. It's my business, and so I know the little ins and outs of things. So when Haas engineered me around here this morning I suspected something. When I saw you I knew at once what was wanted."

Mrs. Matthews laughed. "You're not a vain man, Mr. Greenleaf."

"No, ma'am," he answered, smiling with her, "I'm not, leastways not about women. Yet I could see from the first that you and I were going to be good friends, and that's why I spoke out as I did just now. I understand how you feel about your father. Why, I hope my little girl would feel that way toward me if I wanted any office. I am a warm admirer of your father, but I can't change the policy of the *Chronicle* for a matter of sentiment."

"I didn't intend to ask you to do so as a matter of sentiment. I hoped to be able to appeal to your good judgment. You know, Mr. Greenleaf, there may be two opinions as to the policy of your paper."

So she was carrying the war into his own camp. He had been prepared to resist all tears and feminine appeals. She was proving herself the sensible woman he had thought her. His spirit rose to the coming discussion with her. Her cleverness was stimulating. But he was doomed to disappointment.

"I sha'n't spoil our lunch by pursuing this subject," she said. "I never say anything more when a man says to me, in effect, that his mind is made up. I know the uselessness of it. Haven't I brought up my husband and father! You mustn't think I am hurt, that I don't appreciate you have good reasons on

your side. And then, too, I know that you must privately honour my dear father, who is one of the noblest men on earth. Do not blame me that I think him deserving of the highest honour the nation can bestow on one of her servants."

Her gracious acceptance of his refusal, her enthusiasm for her father, touched him.

"No one knows better than I that Secretary West has been a good and faithful steward," he answered.

She sighed. "He is much depressed. He feels as you do, that the President is mistaken in his dilatory and compromising policy, and it is this that makes him wish to take the reins of government into his own hands."

Each found the other stimulating to good talk, and they had a merry time over the homely lunch that was served to them. She took care that the conversation should not become personal again.

Greenleaf was a plain man, and he loved the common people. He was bound up in their sorrows and their joys. He was inclined to suspect persons of fashion of heartlessness. When the reforms he agitated in his paper attracted the attention of some rich philanthropist, he was tempted to resent the proffered aid as condescension. In Mrs. Matthews, of whose class there could be no more brilliant representative, he detected no arrogance or

lack of sympathy with the hard-working people. He recalled the little supper party of the previous evening, which he had enjoyed thoroughly, and thought afresh that he had never met more simple and unpretentious people. He had the emotional and sympathetic temperament, a kind of poet's instinct for divining what was ideal in people, so that he often felt a naïve surprise to find how antagonisms for certain persons vanished when he was brought in contact with them. This power of deep feeling imparted a lyrical quality to his prose.

He looked at his companion, and realised how much she resembled her father.

"What a pair they would make at the head of things," he thought. West's coldness had repelled him. Now, however, he felt more sympathy with him, realising for the first time that he had suffered, too, from the President's deplorable temporising.

"Mr. Haas told me you thought of building here sometime," she remarked. "I think Washington will become the residence city of the United States. The people it will naturally draw, as well as the absence of all factories, will make the life here one of comparative leisure. If you build you must come out near us. Things are moving that way, and all those who bought land the other side of the Capitol are regretting their mistake. Father

was going to buy on that side, but I persuaded him not to. I have a very good business instinct."

Her suggestion that he should build near her father's property attracted him. His wife was entirely domestic in her tastes, and he had no time for social life, even if he had the inclination. Yet he was ambitious for his daughter, and he thought what an immense advantage it would be to his girl to be under Mrs. Matthews's influence. His quick imagination pictured a spacious home adjoining the Wests' old-fashioned place.

As they finished luncheon, he himself introduced again the subject of the *Chronicle's* policy. "I wish I could help you, Mrs. Matthews, but I can't see my way to it."

"Don't think of it again I beg you," she said, quickly. "I should reproach myself if I thought it would still cause you a moment's uneasiness, and now that our conversation is no longer personal, I can speak frankly. I think the fault with your paper is that it has no positive policy."

"No positive policy!" he echoed.

She shook her head. "No, it just scolds, like an old wife."

"Do my editorials convey no more idea of dignity than that?" he cried, his eyes dancing with fun.

"Oh, scolding is a bad habit!" She leant

forward earnestly. "I'm very far from jesting, Mr. Greenleaf. I think you are doing the country more harm than good. No paper cries for peace louder than the *Chronicle*, yet declaims more bitterly against slavery. I know what you would say, that both ends would be served if we would buy the slaves from the South. I think we all feel that now, even those of us who cried for war. I myself think the war was inevitable. But all that is past. No money would settle the question at this late day. We have not the millions you propose to offer, nor would the South now accept it. Victory on the field, the shedding of more blood, and that alone, will bring this fearful trouble to an end. Yet, like an obstinate old wife, who still cries out the remedy that would have applied to the disease only in its first stages, the *Chronicle* continues to exploit a cure that later events have rendered inefficacious. And the result is that it is disloyal to its party; it fosters discontent when society is already in a dangerous condition." She smiled, and her voice, which had been intense with strong feeling, resumed its conversational tone. "You must pardon me if I speak as one somewhat moved. All my traditions are Republican, and at this day 'Peace Republicans' is only another name for Democrats."

"So you think you've caught a Democratic

bee in my political bonnet!" he said. "What would you advise?"

"That the *Chronicle* should come out openly as a free lance, or else support its party," she answered.

He showed the first touch of passion in their conversation, and brought his hand down heavily on the table. "I have no wish to quarrel with my party, but I will not support it if the President is renominated. There is not a man whose life and home will not be in danger if he is reelected. The Constitution is in danger of being destroyed by a military despotism unequalled in history. I shudder at the strife and anarchy that will result, and the rivers of blood that will flow afresh if there is no change made in the Administration. I see the weeping mother, the distracted wife, and the fatherless children. I see the desolated home, the new-made grave, where the brothers who died by each other's hand are laid. I see the spirit of the people broken by military rule. I see the country plunging into a gulf of national bankruptcy."

She recognised the touch which fired his editorials. Small wonder that many an anxious and honest patriot was appalled when reading them!

She rose. "Can you then wonder, Mr. Greenleaf, that I, feeling as you do that we

have reached a national crisis, should wish to see elected a man who will have the moral force to bring the war to an immediate end? And that I, seeing such a man in my own father, whose public life is unsullied, should have that patriotism in me warmly inspired by the best love of my life? Should you be inclined to judge me harshly for having sought this interview, do not forget that your daughter's pride in you may sometime lead her to extremes as great."

"Mrs. Matthews," he said, "I think you are a very noble woman. I only hope I shall always be as proud of my girl as your father must be of you."

She merely smiled in reply. Her heart was beating violently. The pink roses fastened on her cloak were blurred to her sight.

They went out of the room silently, and down the long centre aisle of the market.

"It isn't one o'clock yet," he said, in a surprised tone. "I thought it was later."

"Poor Mr. Greenleaf," she rejoined, banteringly, "did the moments spent in my society lengthen out so miserably? You must forgive me. Should you ever build near us, how you will fly from your neighbours! I'm sure you'll say to your wife and daughter, 'My dears, don't have that Mrs. Matthews here too often. She is an opinionated woman, and sets me by

the ears!" She lowered her voice. "See, here is my butcher at this next stand. Isn't she magnificent?"

The person she indicated was a large woman with a fresh, pleasant face, crowned by a straw hat tied under her chin, the ribbons falling over her ample bosom. Although it was winter, she wore a stiffly starched print wrapper of dark blue and white. The sleeves were rolled well back from her powerful white arms.

"Her husband died several years ago, and she has kept up the business since. Wouldn't she fit into one of Dickens's novels? I am always amused at a feminine touch about her stall. There's real housewifely pride in her recommendation of her sausage, and she always sticks a rose or two on her spring lambs, as though her motherly heart were touched by the slaughter of the innocents."

To her surprise, her companion stopped. He took up a chicken and began to examine it with supreme gravity. He poked and "hefted" it, and looked at the skin under each wing. Then he returned it to the counter.

"Ma'am," he said, sternly, clearing his throat, "did you think to make a spring chicken out of this ancient dame by pounding its breast-bone? No, ma'am, I refuse to buy it. I'll not countenance such deception of the

trusting public." He turned to go with an air of great virtue, and as he did so accidentally knocked to the floor a dozen of eggs put aside for a customer.

The proprietor of the stand, her hands on her hips, eyed him unflinchingly. "You pay for those eggs or you buy that chicken. Take your choice."

The editor looked at her and knew that he had met his match. He grew suddenly meek.

The butcher turned her attention to his companion. "And what will you be after having to-day, Mrs. Matthews?" she inquired, quite unruffled by the incident.

Portia shook her head. She struggled to control her laughter.

Greenleaf's jest was coming a trifle dear to his prudent purse.

"If I pay for the eggs I've already lost them, and I don't get the chicken. If I buy the chicken I get it, and I don't have to pay up for the eggs," he reasoned. "Wrap it up for me, ma'am. I see you're no chicken at the business. I worked on a farm once myself and learned a thing or two."

He placed it carefully in his carpet-bag, although he did not fancy the idea of lugging it to New York. But he was too economical to entertain the idea of leaving it.

He shook hands heartily with Mrs. Matthews. "Good-bye, I must cut and run if I want to catch my train. Don't let that little matter we were talking about bother you. I'm a homely fellow, and take things as they're meant. Good-bye."

When Mrs. Matthews reached home she found her husband waiting for her.

"Where have you been? What made you so late? We can't go for our drive now." He was openly disappointed.

"There are more important things to do of a morning than to drive out to the Soldiers' Home," she retorted, her usual composure shaken by the strain under which she had been. "I lunched with Mr. Greenleaf."

He stared at her for a moment in shocked surprise. "In other words," he cried, bitterly, "you've forgotten your self-respect. Your foolish ambition to see your father nominated is making a lobbyist of you. My heavens, Portia, what are you thinking of! But don't imagine I shall allow you to do this again. I have some rights."

His lack of self-control made her realise the necessity of keeping hers. "Tom, dear, don't say things you will be sorry for afterward. I am tired and nervous, but later I will explain to you."

He put out his hand as she took a step for-

ward. "Don't come near me. I don't want you to kiss me."

She paused with a look of disdain. "I hadn't the least idea of kissing you," she answered, coldly, and, turning, left the room.

Chapter X

“**D**AVID,” said Virginia, “now that we’re so near, won’t you take me over to the gypsy camp?”

“I’ll think it over,” he answered. “How much more of this stuff do you want?”

“Just a little. That branch just above you, and, oh, there’s a good one, and look at that other spray, too! Could you manage to push your way into the fence and get that one? Don’t prick yourself,” she added, warningly.

The two were in a long lane. In spring it was sweet with the raspberry and elderberry bushes that bordered the rustic fences on either side. The wild pink and the dog-rose were in less abundance, but afforded all the blossoms Virginia could gather.

“I sometimes think that spring will never come,” she said.

Yet the place was not without a bleak December beauty of bare thorny branches and the scarlet hips of the dog-rose. The deep wagon-ruts in the lane were frozen over, yet so lightly that a mere touch of the foot broke

the thin ice, and showed the running water. The snow was nearly gone save in protected places. Under the bushes near the fence some pure white drifts covered the ground where the ferns would spring up a few months later. The sky was blue, but there was a mist in the air that made the distant woods, dark and gloomy with the desolation of winter, take on softening purple shadows.

They had come out to gather fir and rose-hips with which to decorate the house on Christmas. She was carrying a large light basket filled with pine-cones for the Christmas Eve fire. That very morning she had taken out and polished the old silver loving-cup of the Fairfaxes for the spiced glee-wine she would make in such abundance that there would be plenty left to send out to the servants.

Prentiss flung down the last armful of rose-hips on the mass already gathered. This afternoon spent in the open air had given him a more youthful and happy look. His fine face had a better colour than usual.

"Why are you so sweet, Virginia? Why don't you allow us to take Christmas in a gray, middle-aged sort of way? But, no, you insist that we forget our disillusiones and almost persuade us to our old belief in Santa Claus. I grow impatient to think I cannot be a little boy again, and play the old-fashioned kissing-

games with you, for of course you would then be a little girl, too."

"Boys are always thinking of kissing," Virginia stated with a superior air. "If we go to the gypsy camp what shall we do with all this stuff we've gathered?"

"I'll put it out of the way under these bushes, and we can get it again on our way home. Let me shove the basket in first." As he finished the task she called his attention to a turkey-buzzard, perched high in a leafless tree.

He picked up a clod, and sent it whirling through the air. The buzzard flew away, circling round and round, flapping its dark wings.

"Why did you want to scare it?" she asked. "I thought it was interesting to watch it."

He laughed. "It must have been the eternal boy coming out in me. I have flung years and dignity to the winds this afternoon. Virginia, do you know how much I long to kiss you?"

She retreated before his ardent glance. Then, when at a safe distance, she said, mischievously, "I'm glad you don't find me unattractive."

Beneath the coquetry of the woman he read the timidity of the child. What a picture she was in her wine-coloured suit, with her muff and big hat!

"Come, if you want to go to the gypsy

camp. "We must hurry if we would be back in time for dinner," he said.

They walked on in silence for some distance, each constrained. He had never before addressed her with such warmth of feeling. Now he was so quiet that she felt vaguely she was under the ban of his displeasure. She glanced at him a little frightened. She had never been able to forget that Prentiss had been her tutor, and she accorded him an involuntary respect. Her mind, quick, sensitive to beauty, despising the arduous toil that real scholarship demanded, was awed by the young man's love of learning. The imperious, feminine nature so strong in her wished to deal only with the result and not the means; she would have the flower of scholarship at once, and when she found that this meant much work first, she rebelled. She suggested that while he read aloud to her from the classics she would sew, privately thinking that thus she would accomplish something.

"I find my mind comprehends better when I have also the mechanical relief of sewing," she had added, artfully.

But he had answered unsuspiciously that if she felt that way she needed intellectual training, and that she must learn to concentrate her energies better. He set her more difficult tasks, and she learned the lessons out of sheer pride, lest he should think her stupid. The

subject of the sewing was not mentioned a second time. For an hour every evening after dinner he became her teacher, exacting and full of enthusiasm for the subject.

“Don’t you find that you are learning to enjoy studying more? I used to hate it, too, and had to use all my will to keep at my books, but now I never know what it is to feel mentally fatigued. Weariness is physical with me. Yet I sometimes feel as if I had never brought the full force of my mind to bear on my studies. Sometime I shall do a piece of creative work ; then I will know.”

Secretary West, with his never-failing sense of justice, had insisted upon paying Prentiss for his instruction.

“Otherwise I should have to engage a governess for her,” he had said, “and I prefer you.”

So the arrangement had gone on for a year until Virginia had looked up one evening to find that her tutor’s attention and not her own wandered, that his eyes rested more often on her than on the book.

The woman in her triumphed over the schoolmaster. She would not study, she remained away from the library of an evening when she chose, and soon the arrangement was definitely ended by her going abroad with Portia.

Yet in a subtle way his old authority over her held when she returned. The conscious-

ness of it existed in the background of her thoughts.

Now as she walked on by his side her timidity vanished, and she cast several rebellious glances at him. Why should he be her companion instead of La Cerf? It might have been so if he had not offended the Indian the last time he called. She had not seen him since. Every evening, reading, sewing, or playing chess with the Secretary, her attention had been strained to hear the door-bell. Her heart had beaten violently when the servant entered to announce a guest, and the tumultuous throbbing was succeeded by sickening disappointment. She, who before had not known reserve any more than a child, was now all on guard with pride for fear her secret might be guessed.

Prentiss felt her glance and looked down at her.

She smiled quickly. Not for the world would she have hurt his feelings. And her quickened power of sympathy, because of her hidden grief, appreciated how pathetic his happiness was. Never, never, could she love him! She was no longer embarrassed nor timid, and she slipped her little hand through his arm.

"How can I keep steps with you if you take such long strides? Now, let's start together and try."

He suited his step to hers. "Was I walk-

ing too fast for you?" His whole being warmed to the light touch on his arm. He was infinitely touched by her innocent confidence, but he felt no regret for the embarrassment he had caused her a few moments since. He was glad even to have said the words. Ah, if he could but turn now and fold her very gently in his arms; gently, not to startle her, but closely so she could not go.

"Look at the sun, Virginia. See how low it is getting. We shall not be back in time for dinner."

They were nearly to the woods. She looked back at the low sun. It would be only an hour before the sky would take on the glory of colour which would end the short winter day. She turned her gaze again to the trees crowding one another, pushing out their bare branches. How close and gloomy now these woods that only lately had flamed with the splendour of autumn! Had she indeed dreamed that when the forest budded green again in spring she would wander here with La Cerf?

She hung back, clinging more closely to her companion's arm. "I am afraid."

He laughed at her. "After all your brave talk about seeing the gypsies!"

"I am not afraid of them. I don't know what I was afraid of." She had grown a trifle pale.

He was amused and inclined to tease her, and so hastened their steps until they stood well within the forest. The woods sloped down a hill to a creek. On this sheltered side the gypsies were encamped. The unusual mildness of the season enabled them to camp out most of the winter. When it became too cold they abandoned the woods and went into the city to get their livelihood as wandering musicians and beggars. Often the children were put in schools. Virginia's spirits revived at the cheerful scene that opened before them.

"I'm glad we came," she said, brightly, with the quick change of mood he found so fascinating.

Trees had been cut down and a space cleared. Several canvas-covered wagons served instead of tents for sleeping purposes. A ragged wash was hung out to dry. One garment, a child's pink calico frock, fluttered gaily.

Several dark-browed women, with kerchiefs tied over their heads, seated in a group near the fire, affected indifference toward the strangers.

"They are waiting to discover whether we came out of mere curiosity or wish to have our fortunes told," whispered Prentiss.

The children, however, came crowding up to greet them. The oldest of them, a boy, rode up on a pony.

Virginia smiled and, stooping, patted the cheek of the youngest.

Another girl, encouraged, took her hand and asked her a question in the Romany tongue.

She shook her head, wondering what the child's eager words meant. "She has eyes like Countess Polonski," she said to Prentiss. The girl, in a passion at not being understood, flung the hand she held violently from her.

"She says you want your fortune, fifty cents," explained the boy on the pony, eyeing them with bold and scornful gaze.

"Where did you learn to speak English?" inquired Prentiss.

"Circus. See," he cried, boastfully. He dropped Indian fashion to his pony's side.

Prentiss nodded to the little girl and showed her some money.

A smile chased away her sullen look and she ran off toward the women. One of them rose, and as she came toward them they saw she had a young baby in her arms. Over her black hair, was an orange-coloured handkerchief, tied loosely under her chin. It half concealed the enormous gold hoops of her earrings. Her carelessly fastened gown revealed her splendid brown throat. The blue whites of her flashing eyes, the gleam of her fine teeth made brilliant her swarthy face. Pointing to the youngest of the children, who held sturdily to

Virginia's finger, she laughed artlessly and gave them to understand that that child also was hers.

They sat down on small, three-legged stools near the fire. The children and the other women clustered around. Prentiss crossed the gypsy's palm with silver.

The fortune proved to be one of unblemished glory, save for mysterious hints of a letter and a dark woman. It was so typical that Prentiss could not restrain his laughter.

"Look out for that dark woman, Virginia," he cried.

"Of course I don't really believe it," she answered, with dignity.

"You make me think of the old woman who said she didn't believe in ghosts, but was mortal afraid of them," he rejoined.

"You not believe," cried the woman, "I tell you ver' good fortune. I prove. I show." From the bosom of her gown she drew forth a shabby pack of cards, and after repeated shufflings and dealings announced that the fortune was the same.

It was dusk when she finished. The two realised then that all the gypsies had returned and had drawn around them. Fresh fuel was thrown on the fire. The brightness of the flame that leapt up made them appreciate how dark it had become. They started to go, but the gypsies urged them to remain to supper.

"Let us stay," cried Virginia. "You know they won't worry about us at home as long as they know I'm with you." The presence of the children continued to keep her unafraid, although the men who had returned home were a rough looking set.

Three poles were crossed above the fire and an iron kettle suspended from them. In this there was soon bubbling a savoury stew of meat, potatoes, and onions. Coarse dishes and spoons were passed around. The little ones banged the dishes with the spoon impatiently. One of the women at some distance away was milking a cow. The animal's gentle, beautiful head had a familiar appearance to Virginia. She recalled the fine Jersey Mrs. Matthews had missed some months ago. She looked at Prentiss and saw that he read her thought.

"If it is," he murmured, "it will be left behind at the end of the winter and Portia will recover it. But how mad she'll be to think of not getting a cent for all that milk."

A generous pot of coffee was made for the older people, while the children were given mugs of the warm, foaming milk. After the meal was finished a box of cigars was passed around by a cunning looking fellow. Prentiss suspected that they had been stolen, but he smoked two with keen enjoyment. A young gypsy played for them on his violin.

A natural division took place in the party. The women drew off together and the men gathered about Prentiss. To his surprise, he found them interested in public matters, putting shrewd questions about the war and politics. He surmised that they spent their days in the city about saloons and gambling joints, and returned to the camp at night.

The fire was piled higher. It had grown slightly colder, and the mist of the afternoon was gone. The moon was shining bright and full. The handsome mother of the baby rocked herself to and fro, hushing the little one in her bosom, as she laughed and chatted with her companions around Virginia. The tired children seemed to have disappeared mysteriously. They had crawled into the sheltered wagons and gone to sleep. The habits of other wild little creatures of the woods were strong in them, and they learned early to look out for themselves. Cards were proposed. Prentiss knew that money would be put up, and not wishing to be drawn into any entanglement, he called to Virginia that it was time to go.

She was only too willing to go. The deepening of night imparted a sinister wildness to the scene. For some moments her thoughts had been dwelling on La Cerf. She imagined how his songs would sound chanted in these woods. What if he should call at the house

this very evening? She was seized with a frantic eagerness to return. She looked at her watch, a tiny gold one the Secretary had given her on her last birthday. It was after eight o'clock.

They made their farewells and shook hands all around. She gave the mother of the baby her lace-trimmed handkerchief, and Prentiss added some money to the gift.

So they went away. The woods with the moonlight sending down long shafts of light between the trees were more attractive than they had been in the dusk of the closing day.

"We mustn't forget to stop and get the rose-hips and pine-cones we left in the lane," she said. "And David, if Uncle Phineas should happen to ask you if you had heard me say what I wanted for Christmas you might mention a turquoise ring. Do you remember last year that he gave me a steel engraving of Washington for my room? I could have cried."

They passed into the open road, she talking idly, he silent. How much longer could he keep from telling her of his love? At last they came to a deep gully and their shadows were cast down into it.

"Look," she cried, pointing, "look at our shadows. Those great black forms moving with us are you and I. See, that is myself pointing. Isn't it fearful?"

"It is gruesome," he answered. "Let us hurry on."

The road made a sharp bend just beyond. They turned it and he called her attention to an old and long-deserted house which they were approaching. It was set well back from the highway. "I meant to have pointed it out when we went by before, but it slipped my attention."

At the broken gate of the white picket fence he paused. "Let us go up and look in at the windows."

"We will get home so late," she demurred.

"No, no," he assured her, impatiently, pushing her in ahead of him.

The long brick walk was sunken in spots. She clung to his arm. "I may be mistaken," she said, half-jesting, half-fearful, "but it seems to me this has the air of a place where ghosts hang out."

"Hush, my dear," he whispered. "I have an idea we are being followed. I didn't like the looks of those fellows when I refused to play, nor the glances cast on you when you took out your watch. It may have been imagination, but when you called my attention to our shadows down the gully, I thought I saw the shadows of two other persons further back. My cane is a mere stick, and I haven't a revolver with me." He took off his glasses and put them in their case.

"Why do you take them off?" she whispered.

"I don't want them smashed on my nose if it comes to a fight. Look at your watch and see what time it is. I can't see without my glasses. We will wait here half an hour, and then if we hear or see nothing suspicious, we will go on. Sit up here on the railing of the porch."

"What if they should turn in here?" she asked.

"They would not be apt to do so. They would think we went straight on." He walked over and looked in the windows of the house. The winter moon shone in on the bare floor. "Look, Virginia, is there not something terrible about a deserted home? The rooms are filled with ghosts. Think of the guests that must have made merry once in these great parlours."

He went back and leant against the rail beside her.

She trembled and clung to him. "I am afraid," she whispered.

"I love you," he said, "I love you." He kissed her with all the hunger of love denied for years.

Her tears flowed beneath that long caress. She did not wish him to kiss her; she loved hopelessly some one else, but she was powerless in his embrace, and it seemed to her that his kiss drew forth her very life, so that she

felt a violent pain in her heart, and she struggled to push her helpless little hands against his breast. At last he raised his head and looked at her and saw that she was crying. He gathered her again close to him, and she shook with sobs, silent and convulsive.

She was startled from her tears, he from his deep concern, by hearing a noise within the house. At the end of the long parlours an inside door was opened and as instantly closed. But there had been a gleam of orange light from the room beyond, and they had caught a glimpse of an old gray-haired negro. For several moments they were silent in amazement, staring into the house which once more gave the appearance of being wholly deserted.

"They are runaway slaves in hiding," he said. "I wonder if they heard us and we frightened them."

"No," said Virginia, "if they had been frightened they would have put out the light at once and hidden. May I borrow your handkerchief, David? I gave mine to the gypsy who told my fortune."

"You must never cry again, dearest," he said, tenderly.

They left the place with scarcely a thought for the reason which had made Prentiss enter it. His kiss had done away with time. Any fear of the gypsies seemed an emotion long-spent to them both. If his apprehensions had

not been groundless the men must have returned to the camp discouraged, for they neither heard nor caught sight of them the rest of the way home.

The two walked on in silence. His nature was hushed and awed. Her tears had quelled his ardour, but he was conscious of an exaltation strangely deep and quiet.

"Look at the stars, my darling," he said, "see how like bright gold they are. They seem to be streaming down upon us."

She raised her head, and saw them twinkling through a mist of tears. How full of grief was she! She knew that La Cerf did not love her, but she had dreamed in her innocent heart of a life of devotion to the memory of her first and only love. Why had David kissed her? Twice she opened her lips to tell him she cared nothing for him, but her courage failed her. She could not destroy his happiness.

Her varied emotions began to be succeeded by weariness. His prolonged silence irritated her.

"What are you thinking of?" she asked.

"I was thinking of my great unworthiness," he answered. "I had a sudden fear that my happiness could not last. It is so much more than I deserve." He turned and put his arms around her. "Oh, comfort me, Virginia," he cried, "for I thought I should die at the thought!"

Chapter XI

CHRISTMAS morning dawned on a white world.

Virginia had risen before five and gone to six o'clock communion at the chapel in the old-fashioned churchyard a mile away. She had not told Prentiss of her intention for fear he would go with her, and she wished to be alone. As she started down the dark road she noticed ahead of her in the east one brilliant, trembling star that hung low and large in the sky, and thought it might well be the very one the wise men followed. It seemed like midnight, but she remembered the old saying that it was always darkest just before dawn, and she had, moreover, entire faith that nothing evil could befall this holy day. She clung to her childhood fancy that all nature was conscious of what had befallen the world in the birth of its Lord. The soft chill breeze that blew against her whispered of it, the nodding tree-tops were full of meaning, and the bright stars proclaimed it joyfully.

Virginia lifted her heart in prayer as she hastened on. Since the announcement of her

engagement to the family, two days after her visit to the gypsy camp with David, she had been very unhappy, but now she prayed for grace to conquer this grief and to be a good wife to him. Four days had passed since she had taken on this new relation, and the time seemed as many months. But in some ways it had been easier than she could have thought. The consciousness that she did not love David had made her unselfish and tender toward him, and by a strange contradiction she had found a subtle comfort in the loving embraces and kisses that had been forced upon her. The unwelcome lover was still the friend to whom she involuntarily turned. There were times when she could scarcely refrain from putting her face, weeping, on his shoulder and begging him to return La Cerf to her. Then she would remember with shame that the Indian cared nothing for her, and pride would save her from speaking. This morning she had risen with the resolve to put all selfish desires away and her spirits were lighter than they had been for weeks. She almost danced along the road, such blitheness did she feel, and she sang snatches of hymns for the day.

At last she reached the churchyard and entered it. The light from the open door of the chapel stretched out across the snow. All around her were the blessed dead, although they were not really there, she corrected her-

self, but in heaven. In the vestibule she stopped to exchange greetings with their nearest neighbours, who were surprised to find she had come alone and offered to drive her home after the service. But she assured them the sun would then be up and she would enjoy the walk home.

The chapel was decorated in holly wreaths and green boughs. Tall scarlet candles were burning on the altar. The organist came out in his white vestments and played a prelude. Virginia knelt in her pew and prayed earnestly, struggling to put away the image of La Cerf that was forming in her mind. Here in the church itself temptation rose as memory recalled his devotion to the Christian religion. But strength came to her with prayer, and when she went up to the altar to kneel and partake of the sacred bread and wine it was with a heart free of all selfishness.

The east was bright when she came out. Long light clouds were tinged with rose, and even as she looked up it seemed to her that the last stars faded into the paling blue. The snow that had appeared so deep and white in the night was a veil the sun would soon melt.

She watched the first rays brighten the tree-tops and distant hills, all unwitting how the same glory touched her own sweet face to beauty.

The family were sitting down to breakfast when she came in.

"Merry Christmas," she cried, and beginning with Portia went around the circle and kissed them all, pausing when she came to Prentiss, but only a moment, before she bent and touched her lips to his cheek.

"Well done, Virginia," laughed Mrs. Matthews, "that was quite wifely. Take off your things and sit down so we can begin to unwrap our Christmas gifts." She was in the gayest spirits. Only yesterday, an editorial in Greenleaf's happiest style, setting forth her father's peculiar fitness for the Presidency during the present troublous times, had appeared in the *Chronicle*. It had already excited widespread attention and important comment. She had forgotten her husband's irritation at her management of Greenleaf, and it was not in his heart to hold anything against her long. Her delight and triumph in her success filled him with concern for the future should her father fail to be endorsed by the Ohio State convention. Any annoyance of the present could not but be tempered by this solicitude.

The merry unwrapping of gifts took place before the breakfast was served.

Secretary West was as much surprised by his slippers as though Virginia had never worked on them before him. Prentiss gave him a manuscript copy of his poems.

"I shouldn't dare give them to any one else," explained the young man, "but I knew you wouldn't be affected by the fact that I can't find a publisher for them unless I put up the money." He had copied them out with great pains.

"I could have wished nothing better, David," answered the Secretary, greatly pleased. "I shall prize this volume more than any one that is printed in the future."

"I was going to give you something, general," Prentiss went on, "that you would have cared for above anything else. It was a picture of Portia taken when she was a girl. You remember, Portia? I believe it was one you had never seen, Mr. Matthews, and I was going to get it coloured and put in a little frame for you. But it disappeared, where, I don't know. So that is the reason I had to give you cigars."

Mrs. Matthews's gifts were of a practical nature. To the three men she gave all alike, a dozen fine linen shirts and handkerchiefs with their monograms, the entire outfit having been made to order by the nuns of the Georgetown Convent. Virginia's present was a set of napkins and damask table-cloth.

"There was not time to get those embroidered," explained Mrs. Matthews, "but we will take them over to the nuns some day and you shall select your own style of mono-

gram. I think the sisters do the most exquisite needlework in the world. Then you will have the first thing for your linen-chest. Your Cousin Tom's Christmas remembrance to you is to be put in the bank until the trousseau is needed."

"Don't hurry the child so," put in Matthews, kindly, as he noted her confusion. "She's scarcely engaged yet. And you needn't think that what's in the bank is my only Christmas gift to you, Virginia. Some of it is in that envelope beside your napkin."

There was a pearl pin from her uncle and a tiny box addressed to her in David's handwriting. She opened the latter nervously. It contained a turquoise ring.

"You spoke of a blue stone, Virginia," he said, "and that was how I knew what to get."

She smiled back into his happy face.

"Are we ever going to have our coffee?" asked Matthews.

"I've been endeavouring to say grace for some moments," remarked the Secretary.

Prentiss began to drum a tune on the table with both hands, and flinging back his head burst into song.

"While shepherds watched their flocks by night,
All seated on the ground,
The angel of the Lord came down,
And glory shone around.

“ ‘ Fear not ! said he, for mighty dread
Had seized their troubled mind — ’ ”

“ Well, that’s the first time I ever had the grace sung at my table,” said the Secretary. He smiled indulgently.

“ When did you adopt this quaint fashion, David ? ” asked Mrs. Matthews. “ I suppose the next time I give a dinner-party you will open the festivities by starting up with the tune, ‘ Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud ! ’ ”

“ That was the hymn we sang at communion this morning, I mean ‘ While shepherds watched their flocks,’ ” volunteered Virginia. “ That and ‘ Once in Royal David’s City.’ ”

“ The question in my mind is not one of grace but of abundance,” said Matthews ; “ are we ever going to eat ? Prentiss, these women are never going to stop talking and give me a chance to see if my cigars are good.”

“ Father,” said Mrs. Matthews, “ if you will only say grace soon so I can pour the coffee, these two men won’t be in a temper at not getting their morning smoke.”

“ My dear,” he retorted, with dignity, “ I have been endeavouring to do so for the last half-hour.”

When the meal was finished the expectant servants were called in. Their gifts, which had been piled in readiness on a side table,

were distributed by General Matthews and Prentiss. Mrs. Matthews and Virginia pushed the table out of the way and started one of the pickaninnies, black as the ace of spades, with her wool standing out in a dozen or more beribboned braids, to dancing.

Secretary West alone took no part in the servants' enjoyment and went to the library. He felt neither kindness nor unkindness toward these immediate humble representatives of the race he had so splendidly championed. Their demonstrative joy offended him, although he felt Portia was right to allow them to come in on Christmas. But he dismissed the annoying incident from his mind and became oblivious to the sounds of glee that pervaded the house. He had nearly an hour before it was time to start for church, and so he seated himself at the writing-table to outline a pamphlet on the subject of negro suffrage. Senator Chadwick had called on him several days before to urge upon him the wisdom of not offending any of his friends by making public his views in regard to the enfranchisement of the negro.

"It is well to be discreet, Mr. West," he had argued, "and as the matter will not come up anyway until after the war is ended, there is no call upon your conscience needlessly to offend those friends who do not see the matter in the same light."

Unfortunately Chadwick had put his case in the worst light. He had touched at once upon West's aggressive virtue.

"I have nothing to conceal," he had answered, haughtily. "If the people nominate me it will not be without my having shown them entire frankness in regard to the future policy I shall maintain if I am elected."

The Senator had left much depressed. He perceived that West could not look upon himself as under the direction of any one and that he would not work with his committee. Above all he found it difficult to inculcate in him any reasonable fears. The Secretary was entirely optimistic and was confident that all would be for the best. He mingled too little with public men to gain astuteness. But more clearly perhaps than any of his contemporaries did he see that the war would result in the political freedom of the negro.

He began his outline of the system of negro suffrage that his views might be well known over the country as early in his campaign as possible. He was conscious of the repulsion the idea excited even in himself, but because of this personal element he forced himself to advocate it the more vigorously. His mind could conceive of no just reason why the negro should not be admitted to equal legal rights with the white race. If political freedom were not accorded the blacks, they would still be

enslaved and the terrible sacrifice of life the war had occasioned would be in vain.

His mind ran along the lines of this argument as he and his daughter and son-in-law drove into the city to church. He framed it so completely mentally that it would require only the mechanical writing when he returned home that afternoon.

On reaching the church, he went directly in without bowing to any one, having a deeply rooted aversion to any social relations within the precincts of the church. He maintained that it was presumptuous for any one to greet him and welcome him into his own church or to inquire why he had missed a particular service. It was at church more than in any other place that he desired spiritual aloofness, and he held to these views with dignified propriety regardless of the fact that he gave only the impression of pharisaicalness and hauteur. He was always a little depressed during the service, for the familiar prayers had been read on so many sacred occasions now past and gone from his life that the solemn and beautiful phrases sounded the depths of memory. These hours were steeped in a sadness so tender that they had none of the bitterness of grief but rather a consoling peace. It would have been difficult even for Portia to have understood these moods, for her father was a man possessed of singularly few affections, and she

would have traced them to the natural melancholy common to all. But she was always profoundly moved by the expression, at once thoughtful and exalted, even tinged by a certain sweetness, that his face wore.

After the service they drove to the hospital to leave the Christmas hamper Mrs. Matthews had packed for the soldiers, and then around the city to give her remembrances to her friends.

Prentiss and Virginia were left alone at home. When the servants were sent away with their gifts he had gone into the drawing-room to read, hoping she would slip away from the others and follow him. He waited nearly half an hour. He heard the rest of the family start for church, and still she did not come. He sat down impatiently at the piano and began to play. And at last she came.

"How long you were!" he cried. "I thought you were never coming."

"I had to hunt up my kitten and tie a new red ribbon on her for Christmas," she answered.

He put out his arm and drew her to him as he sat on the piano stool.

"Did Portia say my girl was wifely, precious? Did she?" he asked, teasing her lovingly.

She pushed her hands against his breast to

hold herself away from him, and regarded him so strangely that he was startled.

"Has anything happened?"

She shook her head.

"Don't you like your ring, dear?" he asked, anxiously. "I see you haven't it on. Is that it? I will get you another." He was a little hurt.

"Were you ever in love with Portia?" she asked.

He was startled. "It was an infatuation," he said, at last, slowly. "I never loved her."

"Then why did you keep her picture all these years? Did you ever ask her to marry you?"

His face flushed. "Why, yes, I believe I did. But what has that to do with us? It was the foolish fancy of a young man for a beautiful woman to whom he was not in the least suited."

"But you asked her to marry you," she persisted. "If she had said yes you would have married her. She would have been your wife now. I shall always think of that. If she —"

"Virginia," he interrupted, "who has been talking to you? Why do you draw yourself away?" He let her go, and sat watching her helplessly.

She leant against the piano, half turned from him. Where had the peace of the

early morning gone? What was this terrible reaction which had set in and filled her with wild and chaotic emotion? She could no longer remember her loving resolutions to make David happy. She was conscious only of anger with him intensified by her own humiliation. Her sacrifice had been made from pity for his great love, and now she discovered that he had no real need for this compassion. He had loved before, and what could he bring her but the dregs of a wasted affection? He must have loved Portia as she loved La Cerf, a hopeless passion given once and for always. A mad hope that she might regain her freedom surged in her heart. Yet why this pain, instead of relief, at the possibility?

"You should have told me. I would —" she paused, conscience stricken. She had told him nothing. "I remember that evening when you were showing us your photographs in the library that you had then that picture of Portia. I remember now your expression when you looked at it. You will never love me as you loved her."

"No, I never shall," he answered, "for I never loved her really. It was the mad passion of a foolish boy."

She put her hands over her face and began to sob violently. He could talk of the mad passion of a foolish boy, but he could not deceive her, for she, too, knew what such love

meant. And after all he was bringing to her only what she gave him. She had every right to her freedom; she need no longer fear to wound his heart. It was not hers any more than her heart was his.

"My darling," he said, gently, "my life is wrapped up in you. You seem a very spirit to me. There is no comparison between the love I have for you and the infatuation I had for Portia. The one is all sweetness and peace. When with you I often feel as if we were children again. And you, you are like a little child to me in some ways. Oh, Virginia, how can words express my love! Don't turn from me! Don't turn from me!"

"I don't want you to love me as if I were a child," she cried. "I do not want calm affection. I want you to love me as a woman, passionately, as you did Portia."

"My poor child!" he exclaimed, distressed beyond measure.

"For I know what real love should be," she went on, "I — I, too, have loved as you loved her."

He grew pale.

"I cared for Mr. La Cerf," she cried, weeping afresh.

He sat staring at her, dumb in his humiliation. La Cerf of all men! But for his pain he could have laughed. She, Virginia, his flower, his darling child whom he had tutored,

in love with such a man! He recalled the Indian's boasted flirtations with women too numberless to mention. La Cerf had shown him notes and gifts from infatuated girls. In his room he had noted with disgust their photographs, and thought of them with scorn. He had said to himself that they were lower than the poor women in the streets. As he looked dully at Virginia he wondered if this were his punishment for ever daring to judge and despise any one. Must he learn through her that the women he had visited with such contempt were after all only foolish as she and not inherently vicious? Had she as well as those others written notes to La Cerf and given him her picture? He put his hand over his eyes, resting his elbow on the keyboard, inadvertently striking the notes as he did so.

The discordant crash startled them both. It seemed to force on him the necessity of speech. He rose.

"Will you come and sit down beside me on the sofa, Virginia?" he asked, quietly.

She sat down beside him, no longer weeping. He did not offer to touch her. The tragedy of the past moments was gone, but the quiet that had succeeded was more terrible. She had wept before since their engagement, and he had put his arms about her and kissed her. Why did he not do so now and comfort her? She was conscious of being very tired, and of

having grown suddenly strangely indifferent to the fact that he had loved Portia, she La Cerf. She was not robust, and the strain she had been under for the last month had told on her.

She sat between Prentiss and the light, so that her face, turned toward him, was in shadow, but a pang went through his heart. She had risen too early; the walk to the chapel had been too long; she was overtired. The stern resolve had been in his mind to tell her of La Cerf's real character, his irreverent attitude toward women, his lack of intellectual ability. But now he softened.

"Virginia," he said, "I want you to answer me this one question. Who loves you best, La Cerf or I?"

He was once more the schoolmaster to her, to be respected and feared.

"You," she answered, "you." And then because she could not endure his cold, grave eyes fixed on her, she moved nearer him, and bowed her head on his breast, striving, unconsciously, to recover her lover.

He did not draw her closer, or offer to kiss her. There came to her the first feeling of pride she had ever experienced toward him. She drew herself away and rose.

"I will go to my room for awhile."

"Yes, dearest," he said, "you are tired. Do not think of this morning again. We

must not ruin our happiness by indulgence in any morbid thoughts. Happiness is such a frail thing, so easily destroyed. Let us try to be wise. Our follies are so heavily punished. Shall I give you your kitten? It will be company for you."

He picked up the little animal, which had strayed into the room some moments before, and placed it in her arms, then opened the door for her.

She passed him with a feeling of terror. Not even the confession of her love for another man had broken their engagement. She saw that he still held her to it, even though his feeling toward her had changed so that he no longer cared to kiss her.

Prentiss, on his part, was wounded by her expression of fear. He told himself that he must be sane for them both at this crisis, and hold to his belief that he knew her heart better than she did herself. He put on his hat and coat and started for a walk.

"I will not let you go, Virginia," he said to himself, over and over again. "I cannot, I cannot."

Chapter XII

THE day was drawing to a close. General Matthews had remained in town, but would return for dinner. The Secretary and his daughter had driven home alone after making their calls.

She slipped her hand through his arm as they sat side by side on the back seat of the open carriage.

"Isn't this nice, father dear," she said, "we really see so little of each other."

He glanced at her in some surprise. He thought they saw a great deal of each other. It seemed to him that Portia always had him under her eye, and for years he had harboured a suspicion, vague as it was uncomfortable, that his daughter tried to manage him. His pride in her was great, but she never set him wholly at ease.

"I hope, my dear," he remarked, "that you will be very cautious in regard to anything you say to your friends about my hopes for the nomination. I should be humiliated to think that any personal influence had been brought to bear in case I received it. I prefer

to be judged wholly on my merits as a public man."

She glanced at him quickly.

"For instance," he continued, "I derive more genuine happiness from the fact that the *Chronicle* has seen fit to change its policy toward me because it has become convinced of my public worth, than if Greenleaf had been my friend, and had done so for personal reasons."

"I should think that such a sudden change might be due to some personal influence," she answered. "The fact still holds good that your public worth, as you put it, was as well established a few weeks ago as now, and the *Chronicle* then was your enemy. I think it is a stronger and more dignified attitude in a man to recognise that a political campaign cannot be run on absolutely ideal lines, and that the end must sometimes justify the means, than it is for him to put on airs, and pretend not to understand what his subordinates are doing. I haven't the least doubt that personal influence was brought to bear upon Greenleaf in this matter. I met him once, and he did not impress me as an Aristides."

The Secretary was deeply wounded. "Portia," he said, "I have had much experience in the world, and I have loved virtue. It has never been to my disadvantage, and now, at my age, after a life devoted to public service, I retain my self-respect."

"I know," she said, "but do you consider the exercise of common sense incompatible with self-respect?" She was still haunted by the fear that had come to her the night of the theatre, when she had comprehended fully for the first time the President's popularity with the people. The attitude of the maimed soldier who had visited him in his box was significant of the class he represented.

"I think," she continued, "that that injunction we are all taught from our youth upwards, 'to be in the world but not of it,' excuses many a harebrained enthusiast to himself for deliberately refusing to accept the advice of wise and experienced people. For myself I love worldliness when it is of the better kind and tends toward sanity."

"I sometimes think that you visit me with scorn," he answered. "I am deeply hurt, Portia."

"You know how I admire and love you," she cried; "my only wish is that you might be wiser for your own sake, for both our sakes. Why is it necessary for you to issue that paper on the political freedom of the negro at this particular time? You had not intended to do so until you were advised not to. Be careful that you do not confound obstinacy with public virtue. It hurts me to speak so to you, but I must say what I think in regard to so vital a matter."

He drew a long sigh and looked away from her over the pleasant landscape. He had been so serene and happy until this last half-hour. Did his daughter know him so little that she did not comprehend he felt in honour bound to make his views known if failing to do so would in any way affect his nomination?

"If you believe that you are best fitted to bring order out of chaos, and that you can bring the war to a speedy end, then it is your duty to do all that is in your power to bring about your election. As I have said before, father dear, the wisdom of the serpent has its place with the harmlessness of the dove."

"I do not think you remember that I am your father," he said. "Even in a wife, Portia, I could not endure calmly what you have said to me, and I can do so much less in a daughter."

"I had hoped the world had advanced beyond such a sentimental attitude. I certainly hope, now that I have reached a maturity of some years' duration, that our affection and admiration for each other is based on our respective characters and not on the mere tie of blood." She smiled. "But you are just like all men. Your sex cannot bear a word of reproof from a woman and your gallantry alone makes it possible for you even to listen to her advice. We never suppose you heed it. I have given up ever saying anything to Tom,

although the glare he gives me when I do always rather tempts me to draw him on."

"I have no doubt that I hold old-fashioned views," answered the Secretary, stiffly.

She patted his arm affectionately. "You do, dear," she retorted, laughing, "never doubt it."

They had little to say to each other the rest of the way home. Her busy mind was already wondering if the issuing of his proposed paper on the negro question could not be turned to his advantage by a clever editorial from Greenleaf's ready pen. Although she sometimes spoke with intensity she never kept the least feeling against her antagonist in an argument. She felt renewed love and respect for this very attitude her father took, even if she did deplore it for political reasons. She would have been utterly amazed could she have divined the resentment he felt toward her beneath his mask of pride.

She spent the remainder of the afternoon in her room acknowledging the gifts that had been sent her. Her systematic nature disliked to have any duties drag over into the next day. She took a real pleasure in the writing and sealing of the notes. The sense of accomplishment in the slightest way brought its modicum of happiness. Those presents which she did not fancy she wrapped up carefully in tissue-paper and laid away in a drawer to be given to others by herself in time. She had received

so much this year that when she finished her labour she was tired and not sure that she particularly cared for Christmas. An exquisite handkerchief sent her from abroad she enclosed again in its box with her own card, and directed it to a friend in the West whose husband was a man of local political prominence. Then she dressed herself for dinner. Mr. and Mrs. Haas and La Cerf were to be the only guests. With the exception of one or two intimate friends, the Secretary did not care to have any one outside the family at his Christmas table. He loved the idea of a hearty old-fashioned dinner such as he used to have in the country when a boy. Portia took care they should have cider instead of wine on this occasion, and that the dessert should consist of fried cakes, hickory nuts, and mince pie.

She went down the stairs regretting that there were not more guests to see how attractive the house looked in its Christmas greens. Virginia and the old negro butler had wound fir ropes down either balustrade of the stairway, and about the lamps on the newel-posts. The steel-engravings on the walls had been brightened by holly twined around their gold frames. In the panel windows on either side of the front door wreaths were hung by scarlet ribbons. The sunset light shone against the gothic-like panes, and filled the hall with a radiant glory.

"The sunset will be lovely," she said to herself, and thought she would sit down at one of the windows to watch it.

As she put the package containing the handkerchief on the table, she noticed that some other packages and letters had also been put out in readiness for the morning's mail. There was a long, bulky envelope addressed in her father's hand to a leading Ohio newspaper. She knew it to be the article on negro suffrage. It was in her power to suppress it. West would not watch for its appearance. In his busy life, with new burdens and perplexities coming every day, he would give no more thought to a completed task, especially as this particular one dealt with his personal ambition, and not with his public duties.

"I really ought not to allow this to be mailed," she thought. "But in common decency I can do nothing. Why isn't Senator Chadwick here to slip it into his pocket? He would have no scruples."

She turned away resolutely. It was growing colder; the glass was chill to her touch. "We shall have another frost to-night," she thought.

The sun was just dropping below the horizon. The sky was a clear turquoise back of the dark pines. "What a coward I am," she said aloud, "to wish Senator Chadwick were here to do what I ought to do myself!" She turned, and, picking up the envelope, tore it

and its contents through and through. She put the fragments in the pocket of her skirt. A strange faintness succeeded the action. What had she done to her father? She felt that she had destroyed the living work of his hands.

Some one was coming down the stairs. It was Virginia, who passed on into the drawing-room without seeing her cousin. Portia remained silent. She was not in the mood to speak to any one.

"What is David thinking of to marry that child? Neither of them has a cent beyond his salary," she murmured, trying to take her thought away from what she had just done.

Virginia passed before the glow of the open fire. She lighted the lamp on the table, and replaced the rose-shaded globe. Suddenly she started.

In the cushioned easy-chair before the fire reclined the long figure of La Cerf relaxed in sleep. He had come early, and had been waiting an hour for the family to come in.

She stood gazing at him like one transfixed. His face, with its profile so like a Roman's, held in sleep an even more inscrutable look.

With trembling hand she reached past him to take down the candle on that end of the mantel. She lighted it. As she was returning it to its place a drop of the hot wax fell on La Cerf's hand. There flashed into her mind the legend of Psyche.

There was no tremor in his hand, but, as she glanced from it to its face, she met the gaze of his wide-open eyes.

She was fascinated, fluttering, distressed. The candle she still held brought into vivid relief her startled face.

La Cerf's eyes narrowed into an expression of mingled cruelty and triumph. He had not forgotten the time Prentiss had forced him to resign his position at the piano. There burned within his breast a sense of injury for that and for other incidents in the past. Underneath his affairs with women, those idle flirtations which had filled his tutor with such scorn, he retained, though with wavering faith, a clinging to his old ideals of scholarship. Any real achievement along those lines was not possible, owing to his lack of power to grasp a subject fully, and to his constitutional indolence. Civilisation had destroyed in him any longing for outdoor life, and had implanted in him a reverence for learning. If he ever ventured to utter a sentiment, so naïve in its very pretence of knowledge, in the presence of his former tutor, his words were invariably greeted by a smile from Prentiss or a contemptuous glance. The latter never guessed that the Indian's haughty and ridiculous assumption of learning hid a childlike attitude of mind.

The hatred La Cerf had cherished toward Prentiss for his superciliousness clamoured for

revenge as he continued to gaze up at Virginia, knowing that his dark look held her. Only this afternoon General Matthews had told him of the engagement of the two.

She shrank backwards, but her eyes still stared down into his. The candle flamed bright and clear. It made an aura of her hair.

From her position in the hall Mrs. Matthews could not see La Cerf. She was turned from her mental distress by the picture the girl made. She looked like a wondering Christmas angel, stricken motionless, with her scarlet parted lips, her wide blue eyes, her bright hair.

"She is exquisite," thought Portia. "I suppose she is listening for David," and involuntarily, she herself looked to see if Prentiss were coming home from his walk.

Psyche's drop of burning wax had discovered a god in the mysterious stranger. But she, Virginia, who had fancied a very prince beneath the inscrutable bearing of the Indian, what had she discovered? What had she done to make him look at her so? Trembling, she put the candle on the table.

He rose to his feet, and, in her amazement at his cruel expression, she perceived neither his outstretched hand nor how close his face approached hers, until his arm tightened suddenly like a vice about her. Before she had time to make any resistance, he kissed her.

Portia saw the dark form of the Indian rise suddenly from the chair which had hidden him from her view, and draw the unresisting girl into his embrace. Her first thought, after the shock, was to look around to be sure that no one else had witnessed the tableau.

"Is she crazy?" she cried. "Virginia!"

Her voice carried to La Cerf's ears alone. He turned and saw her. He had been about to kiss the girl again. Now, in his mortification, he pushed her from him.

Anger and shame seized him. Long ago he had conceived a kind of worship for Mrs. Matthews. He had feared to show it to her, although he felt she, too, admired him in turn. He pointed to Virginia, who had sunk into a chair, and covered her face with her hands.

"I do not care for her," he said, his voice husky with emotion; "she is like all the rest. I hate her. I hate Prentiss. I do not care for her."

Mrs. Matthews gave him a glance of contempt. Did the fool suppose she was jealous? Later he should be punished for his presumption. But now she had no time for him. She dragged Virginia's hands away from her face.

"My child, do you hear him? He does not care for you. He hates you." She felt that now or never was the time to rid the girl's mind of any foolish thought of this man. "I shall not let go of your hands until you answer me."

"I do not care for her," repeated La Cerf, in his sullen rage. "It is you I love."

"I hear him," said Virginia, compelled by her cousin's remorseless grasp.

The front doorbell pealed long and merrily through the house. Mrs. Matthews blew out the flame of the lamp.

"Try to compose yourself. Remember not to give way. Father's dinner would be spoiled if I said you were sick. You can't go to your room."

"We are coming right in," cried the cheerful voice of Mrs. Haas. "What a lovely fire! Merry Christmas, Portia. Why, Mr. La Cerf, how do you do? Merry Christmas."

"Here is Virginia, too," rejoined Mrs. Matthews. "Let me take your things. Do you like to tell ghost-stories by the firelight, when it is getting dark?"

"So that is what you were doing," spoke Haas, heartily. "Not a bad plan. Mr. La Cerf, were you telling some tale of your Indian ancestors?"

La Cerf scowled at him.

"I will tell you one," Haas volunteered. "No, better yet, I will sing you the Erl-King." He smiled at them all, as he stood drawing off his gloves, quite unconscious of the black look the Indian bent on him. The firelight shone on his wholesome German face.

Prentiss came into the room while Haas was

singing, and made his way to Virginia's side. In the protection of the shadow the fire cast he took her hand, and held it tenderly in his.

La Cerf's presence caused him no particular emotion. The passion and grief of the scene in the morning had drawn him and Virginia nearer. As she sat beside him, it seemed as if she were indeed his wife, so sweet the fire-light confidence of their clasped hands.

Chapter XIII

LA CERF called the next morning to make his apologies to Mrs. Matthews. The previous evening had afforded him no opportunity to do so.

"I think it is to my cousin, rather than to me, to whom you owe an apology," she said, when he made known the nature of his errand, "if my sight did not mistake me, it was she and not myself on whom you bestowed your affectionate greeting."

He regarded her solemnly. "I do not like her. Why should I apologise to her? She wanted me to kiss her. But I, I love you. I would not have kissed her had I thought it would have made you angry with me." He touched his breast. "I have here your picture in my pocket, and I am not ashamed to carry a woman's picture about me because this has your face." He was interrupted by a spell of coughing.

"You had better move nearer the fire," she suggested. "I think there's a draught from that window."

"I always tell every one what a fine Presi-

dent your father would be," he finished, and relapsed into a gloomy silence.

"Your expressions of regard for me I pass over on condition that you never repeat them," she answered. "I must also ask you to return my picture. Concerning my cousin, I am sorry that you should have taken such unfair advantage of one who is not much more than a little girl in my family. General Matthews and I have never shown you anything but kindness, Mr. La Cerf, but I do not deplore this affair on our account as I do on David's. You knew from my husband that Virginia and he were engaged. It is this that fills me with such keen resentment. Otherwise I should have considered both you and her extremely foolish and imprudent young people and should have put an end to any further nonsense. Were it any one else but yourself he would not have been again admitted to my home. We expect a gentleman not to kiss the fiancée of his friend nor to tell a married woman that he loves her."

La Cerf started to rise, his face quivering with anger.

She laid her hand a moment on his. Her touch, her swift smile, quieted him. "Please wait a minute," she begged; "if I were not fond of you I would not speak so frankly to you." Both her magnetism and force were great. The fairness of her colouring fascinated

him. He made no further effort to leave, and sank back into his chair.

She continued with a kindness that disarmed his resentment. "I do not blame you for the attitude you assume toward women as I would blame an American —"

"I am an American," he interrupted, fiercely.

"You did not let me finish." She corrected the impression with quick tact. "As I would blame an American who had the traditions of a New Englander or Southerner."

He understood her meaning and was humiliated. She would not hold him responsible because of the blood that was in him. His ambition had been to be both a scholar and a gentleman. Prentiss sneered at his inability to learn and Mrs. Matthews had just all but told him he had the instincts of the savage. Despair filled his heart. His mind groped vaguely for the reason which would give him the clue to his lack of success.

Would he have been happier if he had lived according to the way of his people, wild and savage and free, untrammelled by the fetters of civilisation? His fancy recoiled. His mother had been educated in the girls' mission school, and she had imparted to her son her own meek reverence for the wisdom of the white race. The more virile traits in his nature had succumbed to this maternal inheritance, which he did not recognise. He had long since scorned

to take notice of his mother. She had married a second time and returned to the customs of her tribe. But Nature had revenged herself in the beginning for this unfilial conduct of the future, and in bestowing upon him a body beautiful in its symmetry as it was splendid in its height and power she had given him his mother's spirit.

"I have often wished before this to speak to you," continued Mrs. Matthews, "but until now I have had neither the courage nor the opportunity. Both General Matthews and I have felt that you are not the man your foster-father wished you to be. He gave you every advantage, the right to take his name if you so desired, and left you his fortune. He did not expect that you would fritter away your time with silly women or in lounging at your club. He wished you to become a good citizen, and yet, I think, you have never voted. You take no part in our politics; you shrink from a public duty in not going to the war. You ought to be on the field this day fighting for your country."

He regarded her steadfastly, but did not speak. For the first time he was distinctly conscious that her attitude toward him was different from that of other women. In her eyes was a compassionate though impersonal regard, which he could not analyse, but which his vanity resented. Yet an emotion, more

nearly approaching tenderness in him than he had ever known, welcomed it.

Mrs. Matthews's expression of large kindness and pity was not so much for him, the individual, as for his race. Back of him she saw his conquered, yet most unconquered, dying people.

She, the only woman who had ever compelled his respect, who was so beautiful that he wished to sit silent in her presence, she cared nothing for him, ran La Cerf's painful thoughts. His lurking contempt for other women crystallised into hatred of them intense as his deification of her. She had not wished him to make love to her, because she was very proud and was married. She had not flattered and courted him, but had told him to fight for his country like a brave American.

This honouring of her in his heart warred against a passion for her person, which he knew he never could attain. It maddened him. Twice he rose to go, twice reseated himself. He did not dare to touch her. He longed to rush from her, but could not bring himself to go. He could not remove his baffled, wounded, and passionate gaze from that perfect face. She saw his features intensified in their strange and fascinating beauty by the agony of his mind. For the first time she appreciated how it was that others had

declared him noble-looking. At this moment his race, as romance had conceived it in its highest, earliest type, shone out in him. In his eyes was the expression of a wounded animal.

Speculations regarding him crowded into her mind. "He will not live long after this, or else he will sink to the besotted condition of his tribe. He has exceeded his heritage in comprehending, even to this extent, what love might be. He could have borne success in love, but he will succumb to defeat. His religion will mean nothing more to him."

He still remained silent, not knowing what to do, nor where to go, as if any return to his former way of living were cut off from him. Then relief, at memory of her words, came to him. He rose. The light fell on his head and figure. This moment was making him magnificent. She came near to a feeling of admiration for him.

"I am going to the war," he said. "I shall enlist to-day. Farewell."

He took up his overcoat from a chair, and began to put it on. For the first time she observed how carefully he had dressed himself for this morning call; wearing his high silk hat, a carnation in his buttonhole, and pearl kid gloves on his small hands. His long-tailed bright blue coat had gold buttons. What a dandy the boy was! Had he really thought

to impress her? She admitted that his finery did not make him seem overdressed nor vulgar, and she wondered how her father could have compared him to a mulatto. In his dark way she had never seen a more aristocratic-looking man.

He tried not to look at her again. Mingled with his distress was scorn that a woman, though it were she, should send him to the war. It made him haughty and resentful. Pride crushed the passion that longed to turn and hold her in one wild embrace of parting.

But as Mrs. Matthews rose, and so came within his averted vision, he caught the gleam of her golden hair, and suddenly he put out his hand and touched a tendril that had escaped from the confinement of the ivory comb she was wearing.

It seemed to her that his gesture was that of a child or savage attracted by some bright object. In another moment he was gone. She heard the front door close after him, and was tempted to call him back. She felt that she was sending a boy to his death.

Virginia had not appeared at breakfast. Her absence irritated Mrs. Matthews, who felt that for her to do less than to ignore the scene of the previous day was unpardonable. She herself had not intended to mention it again. She felt that her cousin, by keeping to her room, compelled a visit from her to inquire, in all

decency, if she were ill. In all probability there would be a scene. She could imagine the tears and regrets, the sentimental resolves to tell David the circumstance. He had been in too good spirits at breakfast to make her suppose that Virginia had told him anything the night before. She went up-stairs with an entire absence of sympathy.

To her surprise, she found her cousin writing on her lap by the window.

"Why don't you sit at the desk, my dear, if you wish to write? It's inconvenient to hold the paper that way. Besides, you are apt to spot your dress with ink." She shut the door, and sat down on the edge of the bed.

Virginia made no reply except to put the sheet on which she was writing inside the book that made temporary shift for the desk. She was dressed in a gray travelling suit. On the bed were her hat and gloves and veil. Mrs. Matthews saw that her trunk had been dragged out from the closet. It was closed, and she could not tell whether it had yet been packed or not.

"What does this mean?" she asked, imperatively, with a gesture toward the trunk.

"I am going away," answered Virginia. "As soon as I had finished this letter I was coming to ask you if you would please cash the check Cousin Tom gave me yesterday for

my Christmas gift. If you could I would not have to go to the bank. I shall need it for my railroad fare."

"May I inquire where you are going?" said Mrs. Matthews.

"Only as far as Alexandria to visit my great-aunt there. She has often asked me to come."

"Very well," answered her cousin, "I will have Tom take you down himself. I do not think the journey will be too much for him. It will be only a few hours."

Until now Virginia had maintained her self-control, but her cousin's willingness to let her have her own way was so unexpected that her fortitude gave way and she began to weep.

"Have you had your breakfast?" asked Portia.

She was answered by a nod. "Then stop crying. You have been ridiculous enough already without adding tears. And to be perfectly frank with you, my dear, I would rather see you kiss another young man than go into a fit of hysterics."

"I didn't kiss him. He kissed me!" cried Virginia.

"It's tweedle-dee and tweedle-dum between the two," retorted Portia. "I have just had a call from Mr. La Cerf. He was quite as absurd as you are, but I lavished upon him my only talent, good common sense. And I am going to talk to you in the same way. There

is still time to have a talk before you make your final decision to take the train. First of all you will be spared seeing him for some months, at any rate, as he is going to the war. He will enlist to-day."

"We shall never see him again," said Virginia; "he will be killed."

As Mrs. Matthews met the girl's wide, solemn eyes wet with suspended tears, she, too, felt a thrill of apprehension.

"He will be killed," repeated Virginia, folding her hands in her lap in an effort to keep them from trembling. But a long shudder shook her from head to foot.

The other's irritation vanished. She felt more kindly and sympathetic. "We are not concerned with what comes of La Cerf for doing his duty, and now let us think no more of him. Have you told David that you are going? No? Do you owe him nothing, Virginia?"

The other indicated the book she held. "I have a letter in here almost finished to him."

"And you are going to break your engagement with him?"

"Yes," said Virginia; "I am not worthy of him. Because of yesterday."

Portia's laughter rang out, sweet and wholesome, clearing the nervous atmosphere. She leant forward with one of her rare impulses of affection and took the girl's hands warmly

in both of hers. "Is that it? Do you think you are really any different from what you were before this affair? Not a whit. I did not think you a bit more foolish then than I had many times before. Does that comfort you? You little goose, do you think you're the only woman David ever kissed?"

Virginia raised her eyes but quickly looked away, fearing to embarrass the face smiling into her own.

Mrs. Matthews flushed, and drew away. "I think I will tell you something. I see you have guessed that at one time David and I fancied we cared for each other."

"Yes," whispered Virginia.

"Has that had anything to do with your decision?"

There was no reply.

"I suppose I am to infer it has," said Mrs. Matthews. "You do not deny it. You may set your mind at rest, however. We would never have been happy together. You have David's best love. Do you think I don't know him? I was very much in love with him and he was with me. We were no more suited to each other than you and La Cerf. There were two reasons why I refused him. He had no money and he had too strong a will to make me happy. We should have quarrelled and separated. You will make a great mistake if you give him up. He will

never be rich, but he has a future and you do not care for money. It is not essential to your happiness. And you will never love any one else, although now you do not admit that you love him. I knew better than to marry him. But you will be happy with him. His nature demands a wife who will yield to him. And you will do what he says without any thought of giving up your liberty. You are so exasperatingly feminine, Virginia. And David is such an autocrat. Can't you see how well suited you are to each other?"

"Portia," said the girl, "do you think that it will make no difference to David when he learns that with his kiss still on my lips, for he had kissed me early that morning, I let another man kiss me?"

"I don't know," she answered, "I don't know. He has not a nature that forgives easily. I would have been afraid of him if I had married him. Tom has a more violent temper, but he is more generous, more really sympathetic. I am talking to you very frankly, my dear, because it is best for you to understand thoroughly the faults of your husband. If you tell him, I doubt if he will trust you fully again. He is too jealous a man to forget. I advise you never to tell him. It is the only decent and unselfish thing left for you to do. When you are married long enough to have become good friends with your

husband, tell him, if you wish. But make up your mind that while you are still lovers you will never be good friends. You will hurt his pride, wound his faith, and weaken your influence with him. And if you think that you ought to be punished, why, the enforced concealment will be sufficient to one of your sentimental nature." A new thought perplexed her. "I hope you are not thinking any longer of La Cerf. That would be ridiculous."

"He loved you," said Virginia; "he said so."

"And he said so again this morning," spoke Mrs. Matthews, sternly. "Has that anything to do with you?"

Again the shudder ran through the girl's frame.

"They both loved you!" she cried, "you!"

"Love, love, love! Did you ever hear of common-sense?" retorted her cousin. "What is it now? Are you angry with me?"

"No, no," wailed Virginia; "but why don't you go, Portia? I am so humiliated. I shall die. Why do you oppose me? I want to go away."

"Very well," she assented. "I shall say nothing to David. Send him your letter. I don't suppose any one was ever yet thanked for interfering in a lover's quarrel. I am going now to see Tom. I don't want you to go down to Alexandria alone, with so many

soldiers everywhere. I will send John to strap your trunk. I will attend to your lunch." She stopped to kiss her, but the girl drew away.

But before she reached the door, Virginia had run to her, and thrown her arms about her neck. "Dear, dear Portia," she sobbed, "I did not mean to be so horrid to you. I am so unhappy. But I love him, and he loved you."

"Which one do you mean?" asked Mrs. Matthews. "I think you may have to go down to Alexandria, after all, to find out."

Chapter XIV

IN spite of his intense pride, Secretary West could not conceal from his household that he suffered under adverse criticism. He became morbidly sensitive to public opinion. Any attack made upon his character caused him to write long letters to his friends. He showed himself angry and hurt that he should be misjudged by the public he had so long and faithfully served. In these moods he imagined that all he wished was to be allowed to retire to the peace and content of private life as soon as his present term of office ended. He was not on cordial terms with the other members of the Cabinet, so haughty was his attitude toward his equals. His aversion to the President intensified. The latter persisted in treating West as a subordinate, and did not appear to regard him seriously as a prospective rival candidate. The Secretary received, however, the devotion of a number of younger men and second-rate politicians who thronged the capital. It needed but their encouragement and assurances of faith in the strength of his position to put him into the most optimistic humour.

His son-in-law, during these disturbed days, was his sharpest thorn in the flesh. He had never done Matthews justice. He measured him by his old-fashioned idea of what made a gentleman in the purely worldly sense of the word, — a classical education, and the adoption of one of the learned professions if a man's private fortune were not sufficient to support him. But his daughter's husband had not a schoolboy's knowledge of Greek and Latin, and his immense fortune came from the large mills he owned in Massachusetts. When the war broke out, Matthews had put a business manager in his place, and enlisted. He had proved himself an intrepid soldier.

West considered personal bravery so natural a characteristic of man that he attached no particular virtue to it in Matthews's case. Much of his coldness came from this inability to feel enthusiasm over moral nobility. He was seldom appealed to on the emotional side of his nature. Virtue was a kind of intellectual conviction with him. Wrongdoing seemed so incompatible with wisdom that he could not conceive of an intelligent person loving evil. So it was that he felt no thrill at the recounting of a brave deed, nor any throb of sympathy at some personal sacrifice which made the world kin.

From the first General Matthews had shown himself lacking in all sympathy with the Secre-

tary's ambition, and the latter could not forgive him. Senator Chadwick had further antagonised the two men. He was unable to understand such family policy.

"I should think he would want to see you President, Mr. West," he would say, when his busy mind thought of the influence Matthews, with his unlimited money, his popularity with the soldiers, and his power over the millhands, might exert in his father-in-law's behalf. "I should think he would for his wife's sake."

He sought Matthews, and quietly endeavoured to find out if he had any reason for his antagonism, but was met by so repellent a stare at his advances that he gave the matter up for the time being.

"He'll come around once you're nominated," he assured the Secretary, "then I'm confident he'll pitch in and work with the rest of us. At present, though, he's a losing card. I'm sure that all he needs is to be convinced you have a fighting chance, and we'll show him that you have. He's too long-headed to hunt a mare's nest."

This intimacy between West and Chadwick was an almost incredible fact to Matthews. He broke through his habitual reserve to speak of it to Prentiss one evening. The day had been mild, with a touch of spring, and the two started for an after-dinner stroll.

The three men had dined alone, as Mrs. Matthews was in town assisting at a reception, which was to last through the afternoon and evening.

As they paused on the verandah to light their cigars, his glance strayed in the library window, and he saw his father-in-law lighting the lamp preparatory to hours of work.

"See how gray he's getting, Prentiss. I declare, much as he irritates me, it goes to my heart to see him these days. It's going hard with him, and it will go harder in the end I'm afraid. Now, why couldn't he be companionable, and go for a walk with us? It would do him good. He ought to smoke, don't you think so?"

"That's what I tell him," answered Prentiss. "But of course it does no good. He's a great man and I'm not, and I lay the difference to the fact that he has the faults of his virtues, and I have the virtues of my faults."

"How's that?" cried Matthews. "Just say that over again, if you please."

Prentiss laughed. "What I mean is that if he smoked and drank a little he would be what we are apt to call more of a good fellow, and would be more popular."

"I'm sure of it," answered his companion. "He'd learn not to fly off at a tangent, and he'd tell a good story without spoiling it. I can imagine what he'd say of me after hearing

your nice discrimination of the faults of virtues and the virtues of faults. He'd say I possessed the faults of my faults."

"I'm sorry," rejoined the younger man, simply. He wished that Matthews were not so opposed to West's political ambitions. With a sincere appreciation of the virtues of both men, he could see what an admirable combination the two would make if they could once be persuaded to work together. West needed just such an adviser, one who had the honour of the soldier as well as the shrewdness of the business man. Prentiss was most loyally devoted to his chief. But he wished he drew stronger men around him. He knew him to be absolutely unsuspicious, accepting any word from a supposed friend with pathetic trustfulness.

Unlike Prentiss, Matthews had not the touch of the poet in him to make him reverence this childlike confidence in a man who was really great, and he deplored afresh the confidential relations with Chadwick.

"I am perfectly sure that, aside from his pushing Mr. West politically, he has some other scheme up his sleeve to make money. He is probably working to get some valuable hint as to investing money."

"Well, he'll never get that hint," rejoined Prentiss. "Once Mr. West suspects any such design he will close up like a clam. Only

he never will suspect, and the schemers will be more baffled by his reserve than by a direct refusal. And when there have been politicians bold enough to ask openly for a suggestion to operate a financial deal, I have seen him stare at them with such angry amazement that they must have hated him ever after for his contempt."

"I must turn back," remarked General Matthews; "it is getting damp, and I felt a twinge in my wound. Walk back a way with me, and then you can start off again if you want a longer walk." He was secretly depressed. The sting of his disapproval of the Secretary's intimacy with Chadwick was his wife's friendship with the man.

"He's a low fellow," he said. "I've found out how he first got his start in the law. It seems there was a railroad disaster, a collision just outside the depot in his native town, and he was there actually on hand before the nurses and surgeons, getting the names of the wounded, and following them up to the hospitals to get their authority to open suit against the railroad. What do you think of that?"

"How like an enterprising ghoul," commented Prentiss, smiling. "I can imagine how dapperly he stepped about over and around the wreckage. If Mr. West asks for me tell him I'll be back in good time. I'm

restless, and want a longer walk. Still, I think you're wise to go in."

He went in a moment himself to get his pipe and to replenish his match-box. As he stepped out again upon the verandah a carriage came rapidly up the driveway, and Senator Chadwick's pale face, beneath a high silk hat, was thrust out of the door. When the cab drew up he stepped briskly out, and greeted Prentiss cordially.

"I was thinking of you," he said, "and an idea I've had in my mind for some time matured on the way out. I hoped I'd get a chance to see you. You're not in a hurry, are you?"

"No," said Prentiss, coldly, eyeing him distrustfully.

"I suppose you know I'm not a poor man," continued Chadwick, smiling pleasantly.

The younger man made no answer. He suspected the other was planning to bribe him for some reason, which the ensuing conversation would disclose.

"I haven't the literary gift," Chadwick went on, "but you have. Of course, I have some power of expressing myself in speaking, but I sometimes fear it is more emotional than intellectual," he added, modestly. Even in the twilight his companion could see him flush. Like most fair people, he coloured easily.

"You see I don't overestimate myself," he

continued with his pleasant laugh, "but I'm a money-maker, and I can see with half an eye that you're not. Now, I should like to publish your poems for you. My debt to the poets is great. Certain single lines will inspire me to eloquence. I often use a verse or two most effectively in a speech. Now, sir, I should like to pay part of my debt by assisting a new poet."

Prentiss heard him with mingled emotions, in which shame for his first harsh suspicion predominated. He saw that Chadwick's impulse was generous, and he had not supposed him capable of such a thing. In a moment, however, the answering flush of generosity died out of his heart and left him cold. This little, scheming pettifogger presumed to be his patron! This wire-pulling politician who would stop at no deception! In his mental vision he saw him prowling like a ghoul about the railroad track, and shadowing the victims to the hospital, inflaming their resentment against the company for his purse's profit.

"You are very kind," he answered, with an air of subtle austerity, "but I must work out my own salvation. The day of literary patrons is past, I believe. I hope I can one day say, as Doctor Johnson did, that the public is my patron."

Chadwick was chilled and puzzled. The politician in him was slow to see how any one

could refuse to use the influence of money. His nature grasped more quickly than his mind the fact that he had been snubbed. But Chadwick could look right through a snub, and it was the politician that answered.

"Why, of course, the public will be your real patron. But even genius needs a business manager."

"How would a wife do?" asked Prentiss. He was beginning to appreciate the impossibility of acerbity in the face of such persistent flattery.

"I don't go much on women in business matters myself," Chadwick commented. "Now, if you could find such another as Mrs. Matthews, or better, if you could find a young girl who would put all her money in your hands—" His voice died away.

"Confound it!" he thought. "What did he start talking about wives for, anyway? I suppose he's thinking of that little niece of West's, but he needn't glare at me so." He concluded hastily, his hand on the knocker, "Well, Mr. Prentiss, if the proper wife don't turn up, remember that my offer still holds good."

"Thank you," answered Prentiss, icily. "Good night."

He started off rapidly, and his figure soon became merged in the deepening dusk. The air was warm and damp, and the crescent of

the new moon was veiled by mist. Virginia had been gone six weeks, and he had not heard from her since the first letter breaking their engagement. No comment was made in the family. Mrs. Matthews had told her husband and father that there had been a lovers' quarrel, and all three forbore to mention Virginia's name to Prentiss.

Two things only saved him at this time of his unhappiness. One was his devotion to the Secretary, who placed the greatest dependence upon him. The other relief he found in his work. He wrote untiringly, with something of the instinctive haste of one who feels his task to be greater than his time. He had a feeling that through his work Virginia would be restored to him. Was he not already recovering her, imprisoned in some exquisite passage in which he had caught her charm? The printed pages would hold her very spirit. Ah, no matter how far apart they were, how long they were separated, when she read his book she would see that she had not escaped him.

He followed the road to the camp of the gypsies, and found them gone. Virginia had made him promise not to tell Mrs. Matthews about the cow, so that the wild, dark children might not be deprived of the nourishing milk. He recalled how her fancy had run on in merry planning that, when the gypsies left, she

and David would hunt up the cow, and drive it home together to astonish Portia.

He turned from the desolate woods and started home. Yet when he reached the gate of the deserted house, he went in. He longed for human companionship, becoming superstitious in his grief, and feeling that it would be a good omen to find some soul, even though it were a poor runaway slave, making a home in the house where he had first kissed his sweetheart. He stepped cautiously to the back door, but saw no light nor heard any sound. The door yielded to his touch, and he went within and struck a match. There were traces that the room had been occupied. On the table was a candle burned down nearly to the socket. He lighted it, and guessed from the appearance of the place that the fugitives had been surprised, and fled before they had quite completed their preparations for departure. There was a lunch packed, a roll of clothes on an old broken chair, and on the table a bundle tied up in a bandanna handkerchief. The flickering flame of the candle lighted a bit of gold near the handkerchief. It was the clasp to a necklace. He lifted the beads with a trembling hand, almost unable to believe the evidence of his eyes. It was the string of coral Countess Polonski had given to Virginia. The clasp was broken. She had worn it last on their walk, and she must have

overlooked the fact that she had lost it, thinking she had probably misplaced it. The negroes had probably found it on the verandah the morning after they had been there.

He sat down in one of the crazy chairs. The place was no longer desolate. Had not the wretched slaves found refuge here? How kindly the bare walls, although the corners were dark with dust and cobwebs! Strange that he should be sitting here of all places in the world, with her little necklace in his hands.

General Matthews, entering the library, was surprised to find Senator Chadwick there in earnest conversation with the Secretary. It was only yesterday that he had called to see Portia. Fearing that he intruded on a private conversation, Matthews made a pretence of hunting for a book on the table, and then started to leave the room.

Chadwick, who always affected to be unconscious of any political difference between West and his son-in-law, detained him.

"Don't go, general. We need your level head. Your father will not look at politics in a practical way."

Matthews sat down near the door. "No," he said, smiling coldly, "I fear he is too much a statesman to be a politician, and I'm too much of a soldier. So deal gently with us, Mr. Chadwick."

The other's face coloured ever so slightly, but he retained his pleasant expression. He was about to reply when the Secretary interrupted him.

"I do not think Mr. Matthews is interested in the matter."

"Then so much the better, my dear sir," cried Chadwick, "for we shall then hear an unprejudiced opinion. The condition is this. The Ohio Republicans are setting up a howl because one of your father's appointees, a man by the name of Jenkins, is retained in office, although he is opposed to the government. He consorts openly with men who are doing all they can to hinder the prosecution of the war. The War Republicans want his place for a man named Wilson. Your father has a good excuse for removing him, and at the same time falling in with the wishes of his party. I have been trying to point out to him what a good opportunity this is."

West drew a long sigh of irritation. Chadwick offended his fastidiousness. He gave him a haughty and silencing look, and continued the conversation himself.

"I have been assured by reliable and unprejudiced friends —"

"Friends are always prejudiced," put in Chadwick, smiling.

"That this Jenkins," continued the Secretary, "has discharged his duties faithfully and

well, and I have no proof that he is hostile to the government."

"You don't need proof in politics," persisted Chadwick. "Damn a man with a suspicion and he is in your power." His bright eyes, full of humour, sought Matthews's glance. He kept flicking his gloves over the palm of his hand. His nervousness never seemed due to anxiety, but rather to constant alertness.

For the first time Matthews felt some sympathy with him. It was no easy task to manage West, who persisted in regarding himself as the one man to direct matters.

"My advice would be for Mr. West to look well into the matter at once," he said, "and if a thorough investigation proves the fellow guilty, I'd send him to the right-about quick enough and put in the man my friends wanted. Of course, if he weren't guilty I'd let him stay even if that alone cost me the endorsement of the State convention."

"This matter has nothing to do with me, personally," rejoined the Secretary. "I have presented myself as a candidate to the people. They know me and my work. If they think best to honour me I shall be most grateful. If not, then without resentment I shall soon retire to private life. I may mention, Mr. Matthews, as you do not know all the detail of this circumstance, that this man, Wilson,

owns the *Journal*. I have no wish to manage newspapers. It is true, I admit it frankly, that I was at one time strongly tempted to remove Jenkins because I was told he openly sympathised with those treacherous Northerners who obstructed the prosecution of the war for their own private ends. And now speaking to you both privately, I may say that I have not yet determined just what to do with this man, as, despite the assurances of his friends, I suspect him. If he is guilty I shall punish him as severely as it is in my power to do. However, I refuse to take up the case now. I shall not weigh his case with an eye to my own political advancement. When I act in the matter it will be upon public considerations, not personal. I had not intended to take up this case for a couple of months at the least, as there are others more pressing for immediate attention. I think if you will excuse me I will return to my work. I beg of you do not hurry, Senator, as I know my family will enjoy a visit from you. And do not let us refer to this matter again. I can't consent to the proposition my friends have made to me through you. The affair has been unpleasant and has fretted me. Good night."

Chadwick sat silent for some moments, a half-smile playing on his features. At last he looked toward Matthews. "The affair has been unpleasant and has fretted him," he re-

peated. "I wonder if he knows it's making me turn gray! Is Mrs. Matthews in? I have a paper for her."

"She's assisting at some reception in town," Matthews replied, "but I'm going in for her about ten and I'll give her the paper."

"Thank you, if you will be so kind," answered Chadwick.

They talked on various matters for a quarter of an hour, and then he rose to go.

"But the paper you wanted to leave with me for my wife," his host reminded him.

"Oh, to be sure," he answered. He drew out a package of papers from his waistcoat pocket and glanced them over. "I haven't it here, after all. How stupid of me! Well, never mind. It wasn't a matter of much importance. I'll send it through the mail. Just as much obliged to you."

After his departure Matthews pondered over the social conditions which made it proper for a woman to be on confidential terms politically with a man of whom her husband disapproved. He knew well enough that Chadwick had that paper among those he glanced over, but did not choose to let him have it. Portia had often told him he was lacking in humour, and he tried now to find a cynical amusement in a condition of American life that accorded a wife every liberty and yet brought no criticism upon herself nor roused

her husband's jealousy. But he found there was no real humour for him in it and he could have groaned. He wished he were back on the field with his brigade, but he was not strong enough as yet and, moreover, he was not needed. The war was nearing its end and troops were being ordered north. It had dragged on so wearily that few could accept the fact when it really occurred. He had tried in vain to convince either the Secretary or Portia of the significance of certain field-movements.

He went to the buffet in the dining-room and poured himself out a glass of whiskey and drank it. Then he lighted a cigar and sat down to read until it was time to go for his wife.

Chapter XV

SENATOR CHADWICK drove at once to Willard's Hotel, where he was stopping. It sheltered a strangely mingled society. There at almost any hour of the day were to be found prominent men, and there was always a stream of people passing between Willard's and the White House. Here military men met to talk with each other. Here were half a dozen or more generals off duty, some of them attired in citizen's dress. In the bar-room lingered the well-dressed adventurer and gambler with the smooth manner and sharp glance of his kind. From the windows of the parlour on the second floor, where the mild air was blowing the lace curtains, the defiant, musical tinkle of a piano greeted Chadwick's ears. Some spirited Southern woman was playing "Dixie." He went to the reading-room and glanced down the social column of the local paper. There were few things going on that evening and most of the names were strange to him. It was not likely that Mrs. Matthews would be at any of the places mentioned. He was much perplexed. His real

motive in calling on Mr. West that evening had been to see her. He wished now that he had been frank with Matthews and asked him directly where his wife was, stating that he wished to speak to her on a turn in the political situation. It was not the first time his oversubtlety had defeated his end.

"I must learn to be more direct," he mused. "I must cultivate it. If I don't I'll lose personal force, and I've reached a position now where I can afford to state an opinion positively. I wish I were more brutal. Why didn't I ask outright where I could find his wife instead of beating about the bush and getting nothing?"

He decided to go over to his club and learn the gossip of the day and what the fashionable world was doing. He folded the paper neatly, and as he returned it to the pile from which he had drawn it a headline on the front page caught his attention. It announced a reception at the Russian minister's. Owing to the importance of the affair it had been given space on the first page.

Chadwick, leaning both hands on the edge of the table, re-read the announcement. He had received an invitation and destroyed it. He had his own reasons for having refused to go.

There he would find Mrs. Matthews. He went up to his room and dressed himself carefully in his evening clothes. His face looked

white in the mirror, his fine nose a little pinched like a sick person's. Excitement acted upon him like poison.

"This won't do," he said aloud. He rang the bell and had a small glass of brandy brought to him, and took a third of it. He hated the taste, but it brought back his colour and did away with that pinched expression which distressed him.

The Polonskis were not far away. They had taken an old-fashioned furnished home on Lafayette Square. It was built of bricks and painted light yellow, with an iron balcony across the front.

He flung his cape over his shoulders. Military rule had set the fashion, and even civilians were wearing capes of broadcloth. He crossed the park leisurely, for he did not wish to arrive too early. Neither did he delay overmuch, fearing that if General Matthews arrived before him he might find it difficult to speak to Mrs. Matthews alone.

Lafayette Square was then surrounded by a high picket fence with four gates. At twelve o'clock a policeman went around and sent every one home and locked up for the night.

He noticed several soldiers sitting with their sweethearts on benches, and he bestowed on them a passing contempt. Somehow they reminded him of the days when he was a clerk in the combined dry goods and grocery store

of his native town, and used to take his girl for a stroll in the courthouse park of a summer evening. She was pretty and foolish, and bored by his ambitious plans, so that she discarded him for the owner of the livery stable. Ever since he had been too busy to think of women again.

The hospitable lights of the house to which he was going greeted him when he was still half the length of the park away. A woman in a light dress stepped out on the balcony a moment. Carriages rolled up the street, paused, then went on. The door opened to admit the guests. He reached the gate of the square and lingered by it some moments, struggling to overcome his depression. His early struggles with poverty made a display of luxury and fashion appalling to him, and he struggled vainly to feel at ease in a society whose approval he had long sought. At forty years of age he had learned to dance. Still not even the acquirement of that art had given him the unconscious ease he envied in others. He remembered a remark he had once heard Prentiss make,—that students who had not the freedom of a library when children were seldom able to acquire a literary atmosphere through their college training. So it was with him in a different way. He had not the social atmosphere.

As he went up-stairs to the dressing-room

he encountered Countess Polonski coming down. She shook hands cordially with him.

"Scarcely any one has come yet. I gave my place to Mrs. Matthews and slipped away about half an hour ago to lie down; I was so tired. Are you quite well? I think you look a little pale." She lingered with her hand on the balustrade, smiling at him. She, too, was pale, and unconsciously she sighed.

"I think you've grown thin," he said, abruptly.

At that she laughed. "How unflattering we are to each other! I know you want to see Mrs. Matthews. She is anxious to see you. I will send her up to that balcony off the library. You may have noticed it from the outside. It is so warm out you won't catch cold. I can scarcely wait for spring to come so that I can train up vines and have hanging-baskets. Then I shall sit out there mornings with my sewing. I shall have honeysuckle, to see if I can't entice the humming-birds to visit me. I haven't seen one of the little things since I was a child. Here are some people coming in. I must go on down."

He did not go out on the balcony, but remained in the library. Prudence forbade him sitting out-of-doors at that season of the year, even if the air were mild, and he was inspired by no romantic feeling for Mrs. Matthews to encourage him to run any risk.

She came in eagerly a little later. "I thought I never could get away from Admiral Peale. Senator Chadwick, if you ever start telling funny stories to a woman, and she makes no comment, but just smiles and smiles, you may be sure it's a smile of desperation. What did you think of my plan? Why didn't you write me a note in reply? Are you like Talleyrand, and believe in writing no letters yourself, and keeping all the letters of your friends?" She laid her flowers down on the count's large writing table in the centre of the room, and, sitting down, began to draw off her gloves. "Do you know I never can think clearly with gloves on? They seem in some artificial way to constrain my mind. And anyway I want to look over the paper with you and see your corrections."

"Your feeling about wearing gloves reminds me of one of my friends who is obliged to keep his glasses on in bed in the dark if he wishes to think about anything at that time," Chadwick returned.

He drew a paper from his pocket and handed it to her. The handwriting was her own. "I called at your home earlier this evening. I had forgotten you would be here. I didn't answer your letter because of a masculine prejudice that women are careless and apt to leave things lying around."

"I forgive you," said Mrs. Matthews.

"But what do you think of this?" She spread the sheet of paper open on the table. "How many changes you suggest!" Her tone was one of displeasure. "I was entirely satisfied with it myself," she added, looking up at him. "I did not expect such corrections."

"If you wish indiscriminating approval," he said, smiling, "you should not have consulted me."

There were laughter and voices in the hall, and a fluttering of dresses.

"Are you up here, too, Mrs. Matthews?" cried a girl. "We are all coming in here to have our supper, as there's a regular jam down-stairs."

Mrs. Matthews rose, with the paper at which she had been looking in her hand. "Let us all sit around this table," she proposed.

"That is sensible," spoke Count Polonski, who was one of the party. "Then we shall have something to rest our coffee-cups and saucers on. I ran away for half an hour. I told madame I had to slip away for a rest. I am glad to see you, Senator Chadwick. Will it be too warm if I close the window?"

A young man in the group hastened to close it for him, and Polonski sat down in an easy chair. He was in full diplomatic dress, and his chest was resplendent with jewelled medals.

"Observe me all of you," he remarked, smiling. "I am a sick man, and not able to remain down-stairs longer without rest, if I would. I spent last night in my dressing-gown, locked up in Lafayette Square, like a sheep in a pen. You see our charming balcony? I sent my secretary away, and stepped out to get the fresh air after an evening of work. It was a pleasant night, and the trees in the park beckoned invitingly. I looked up and down the street. There was no one in sight. A theory of mine is that the indulgence of one's impulses, when governed by a delicate propriety, keeps us young. I buttoned my dressing-gown more closely about me, made a dash across the street, and entered the park. I heard the policeman bawling out that he was going to lock the gates, but as I did not wish then to be persuaded to leave I made no answer."

"How did you get out?" inquired Chadwick, not entirely sympathetic. There was something indecent to his fancy in Polonski parading a public thoroughfare in his dressing-gown. He himself would have as soon thought of going in his night-shirt!

"I didn't get out until five o'clock this morning, when I hailed a milkman, and persuaded him to cross the street and rouse my household. I agreed to take two gallons of milk a day from him! I had attracted the

attention of a policeman some hours before, but he took the narrow view that I was an escaped lunatic, and decided it would be safer to wait until daylight to seize me. Mrs. Matthews, what is that paper you are holding against your heart? I hope no enamoured youth has committed the impropriety of writing verses to you. I always feel particularly severe on follies that I once committed myself. He should be exposed. Senator Chadwick, you didn't write them, did you?"

Mrs. Matthews, laughing, held the paper above her head. "If any one can guess the writer I'll show it to you."

"It isn't poetry," cried some one. "The light shines through. It's in solid writing."

Chadwick surreptitiously wiped the perspiration from his brow. He was at a loss to understand Mrs. Matthews's daring.

"But I tell you it is a poem," she insisted. "It's written in blank verse. That's why it looks so solid. I'll read you the first line. Now, listen. 'When to the sessions of sweet, silent thought, I —'"

"Shakespeare," cried a young gentleman.

She admitted the imposture. "Well, I'll give it as it really is, but I blush to read anything that so extols my own virtues."

"Of course she won't read it as it is," spoke another. "Why doesn't some one take it from her?"

A dozen hands reached in playful earnest for the paper. But she escaped them, and darted out into the hall. She had caught a glimpse of a uniform.

"You came just in time to save me, Tom," she cried, merrily, and unfastening his coat she thrust the paper into his inner pocket.

Polonski rose, and dragged his chair up to the table. The servant was coming with the coffee.

He shook his finger at Chadwick. "You wrote that poem. You were the only one who really tried to get it. But Matthews wasn't here to see you."

The other longed to make some brilliant retort, but he was tongue-tied in the presence of the Russian, whom he hated.

He had had enough of the reception, and he went to the dressing-room to get his hat and cape.

"Are you going so soon?" asked Mrs. Matthews, as he passed. She was looking up into her husband's face, like a girl in love, as she fingered one of the gold buttons of his coat. "Wait a minute. Tell me when shall I see you. I am up to my ears in politics, Tom. But you are not to be told anything, because you are so unsympathetic."

"I will call to-morrow morning," answered Chadwick, briefly. He got his hat and coat, and went down-stairs and out of the house.

He did not say good-bye to his hostess. A glance into the parlour showed him that she was surrounded by guests. As he walked back across the square to his hotel, his heart burned within him. He never left Polonski without the feeling that in some intangible way he had been insulted. He had appreciated many a man's superior greatness, but he had never been made to doubt his own astuteness before. The glance of those protuberant gray eyes withered him by their power of scorn. The Russian's cleverness was greater than his own. He could not make him out. He had no personal conceit. He knew well his own intellectual limitations, but his confidence in his own perspicacity had been proved by experience. His attitude toward people in general was naturally kind and gentle. He had a timid temperament and endured agonies over mishaps that never occurred, yet he always showed a cricket-like cheerfulness, and never gave way to discouragement. When speaking in the Senate or on a public platform he was transformed into a brilliant and forceful man, so remarkable was his gift for speaking. Shrewd as he was, he harboured no mean suspicions against a political enemy, and though he did not scruple to use tricks that would have turned the stomach of an honest man, he had not the slightest personal feeling of dislike.

But Polonski instilled poison by his glance of contempt. From hating him, Chadwick's thoughts, as he walked feverishly on, became tinged with dislike even for General Matthews, to whom he had been entirely indifferent a few hours ago. A suspicion of Mrs. Matthews's sincerity rose in his mind, and he thought her daring. West himself was an autocrat, and treated him as a subordinate. He had half a mind to leave him to conduct his own campaign. He felt chilly and wrapped his cape closer about him, and as he did so he was reminded of how Polonski was kept in the park all night. He laughed with a sudden return of good spirits.

"I wish he'd caught his death of cold," he muttered.

The picture his imagination drew of Polonski dying restored his naturally pleasant humour, and he stepped on more jauntily. As he passed a policeman he bestowed on that officer a look of entire friendliness. Perhaps he was the man who took the narrow view that the shivering minister was insane.

Several of his friends were waiting for him, and he took them up to his room and ordered drinks and cigars. For himself he had a cup of coffee, and said that he was ill. The conversation became excited and earnest, and although he listened attentively his thought still ran on the problem Polonski presented to his mind.

He ran over his acquaintances, some of them men of more power and achievement than the Russian, but in him he felt for the first time the greater intricacy of an older civilisation. By contrast his American astuteness seemed superficial. This was all the more galling as perceived against a background of inherited conceit and prejudice on his own part against foreigners. He did not formulate this clearly to himself; it was only a vague resentment, and he would have indignantly repudiated an analysis so damaging to his self-love and patriotism.

The Russian was a great diplomat, and Chadwick saw himself in contrast a politician and a petty lawyer.

"But I will get there yet," he told himself, "I will get there yet." Had he not already risen to his present position from a clerkship in a grocery-store? Let him once gain the reputation of having made a President, and any office would be at his command.

When General Matthews removed his coat that night he took out the paper his wife had thrust into his pocket, and handed it to her.

"Oh, thank you," she said, "I wouldn't have let those people see it for anything in the world." She crossed over, and locked it up in her desk.

He was bitterly disappointed. He knew that the paper must be the one Chadwick had

avoided entrusting to him, but he expected that his wife would at least show him sufficient respect to explain the matter to him, even if she did not show him the manuscript.

They had stayed later at the Polonskis' than they had intended, and the negro who was his personal attendant had gone to bed.

"Never mind, it isn't worth while calling him," said Portia. "I can help you undress. Sit down in the chair and I'll draw off your boots."

He could not bend over without pain on account of the wound in his side. Her service humiliated him. What did it signify when she did not accord him her confidence?

The light fell on her bending head, on the white nape of neck revealed by the loose collar of her dressing-sack. She tugged vigorously at his boots.

"You needn't tell me you're not vain," she cried, a bright colour in her face from the exertion. "You wear as tight boots as you can to make your feet seem small. But they're not small, Tom. So! Do you remember what delicate hands and feet La Cerf had in spite of his height? I've been told they were an Indian characteristic."

"I've never been able to understand why he enlisted so suddenly," he answered. "I'd been at him for months. It seemed strange he didn't come to say good-bye to me."

"How foolish of you to expect anything like a recognition of friendship in an Indian," Portia retorted. "I don't think he could even understand what it meant. He liked you because you didn't offend him, and he didn't know that it would have been only common decency on his part to see you before going. You know I never overestimated him. And if he dies on the field it will be a much more decent ending for him than to come back and go off with consumption. The last time I saw him he had a cough, and his cheek-bones were more prominent than ever. You notice, and you will see that as soon as civilisation gets hold of an Indian consumption sets in or his eyesight goes."

"Nonsense, my dear," cried Matthews, heartily. "Women are so prone to make the incident general. You've probably heard of one case."

"Well, I notice that men are always indulging in generalities about women," she answered. She was too indifferent to his opinion to feel any inclination to repose confidences in him, and to-night in particular she was too much absorbed in other matters to take the trouble to tell him of her last interview with La Cerf. Her father's antagonism to Matthews had had a subtle and evil influence on her attitude toward her husband.

He was so expeditious in making his toilet

that it had been his custom to read aloud while she undressed with more deliberation.

"What shall we read to-night?" he asked.

"I wanted to ask you if you could let me have some money," she said. "It is nice of you to want to read to me, dear, but it would be foolish for me to pretend to be interested when my mind is so full of father."

"Was that what Chadwick wanted of you?" he asked, contemptuously. "What a white-livered little lawyer he is! Well, none of my money will stick to his fingers if I have anything to say about it. Why didn't he come and ask me for it like a man? I hate your men who get at other fellows by flattering their wives. I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings, Portia, but I don't like this man, and didn't from the start."

"I am not aware that your personal liking, nor mine either, for that matter, is concerned in this. Senator Chadwick is father's political manager. It should have been your pleasure, as well as an honour and duty, to have managed it yourself. But don't let us talk of your attitude in that particular matter any more. I am sick to death of your sentimental reasons." She let down her hair, and began to brush it in front of the mirror.

His heart sank as he watched her. Would the time ever come when her mind would be free from ambition, when intruding thoughts of

the world would not destroy the sacredness of their moments alone together, when she would blush and brighten because of his admiring eyes, and take a womanly gladness in her own fairness for his sake? But she accepted beauty, gift of the gods that it was, quite impersonally, and considered it as necessary to her success as good-breeding and tact.

"Well?" she said, impatiently.

"Nothing," he answered. "I was merely reflecting on myself as a sentimentalist."

She sat down, brush in hand, her hair falling about her shoulders. "Tom, dear, why won't you show some common sense and not irritate me so? For instance, how ridiculous of you to abuse Mr. Chadwick. How could he go to you for money when you have openly expressed your lack of sympathy with us? That paper to-night had nothing to do with money, so don't be so suspicious. But he did say to me some days ago that he wanted to hire important men to 'stump' the State. The party has already put up considerable money, but this is to be extra. I told him that I would see he had the money. I had no doubt that you would give it to me. It is the first time you have ever refused any request of mine. I wouldn't ask it of you if you couldn't afford it. I am willing to deny myself for years if it is lost."

"You know I don't care about the money,"

he cried. "It's the principle of the matter. Your father hasn't the ghost of a chance. I don't say this for malice, as you seem to think, but because it's my honest conviction. I have never blamed you, dearest, for being mistaken. You're shut in by a lot of people who, because they like and admire you, think you ought to be in the White House by rights. They're sincere enough. But neither you nor they have any idea how the people feel. And it's the great mass that's going to count, not the aristocratic few. You go down among the soldiers as I have and find out how they feel. They're for the President to a man. The people at home are going to vote with the soldiers. As for giving Chadwick any money, the thought gags me." He paused a moment, and then continued in a quieter tone: "Your father is too much of an autocrat, and has no gift of personal sympathy to fit him for the office to which he aspires. He would be a great Chief Justice, but no President."

"You make things out the way you wish," she cried. "You are blinded to his virtues because of your infatuation for the present man in power. How you can be blinded to his gaucheries, his vulgarity, his Hoosier appearance, and —"

He turned on her with passion. "Hush, Portia, we shall never know a greater and a better man. Have you forgotten how angry

you were with Virginia when the child cried and said that she would willingly give all she had to make his kind face look less sad? He makes us all feel that way."

A faintness came over her. Then she rallied, and anger filled her heart.

"You are very young, Tom," she said, contemptuously, "you make me think of a schoolboy passing through his period of hero-worship."

He was stung and humiliated by her air of superior judgment; though he knew he was in the right he felt hopelessly put in the wrong. He could retort that her own infatuation for her father blinded her to the greatness of a greater man, but he sickened at the thought of bickering with his wife.

It was long before Portia slept that night. She had drawn aside the curtains at the window near the bed, and she lay staring out at the starlit sky and listened to her husband's deep breathing. He had settled a fortune on her when they were married, and she had invested most of it in land, but a considerable sum still remained in the bank, and she could apply it to campaign purposes. Love of possession was so strong in her, however, that she preferred Matthews to give her the money although she was forced to admit the unreason of this to herself.

So deep was her irritation that she felt an

aversion even to being near him, and she rose and sat down in the chair by the window.

Matthews was not asleep. "Don't be foolish," he said, irritably.

"Thank you," she answered, icily.

He turned again on his pillow and tried to sleep. But through his shut lids he seemed to see that lovely, obstinate figure by the window. How perverse she was, how perverse! The fire was nearly out, the room was cold. Splendid as her general health was she had delicate lungs. He fretted.

"I certainly wouldn't think of sitting there without a wrapper or slippers."

She made no reply.

He could not bear it. He sat up in bed.

"My darling," he cried, "don't torment me so! If you want the money you can have it."

She did not move. She was at once relieved and ashamed. She had forced him to go against his judgment by an entirely feminine device, and her nature was large enough for her to appreciate his generosity and not to hold him in contempt as weak. Love of possession struggled with her pride.

He rose and put on his dressing-gown.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I am going to start up the fire," he answered, "if you are so foolish as to insist upon sitting up in the cold."

She watched him silently. He made the

fire with difficulty because of the stiffness resultant from his wound. In spite of herself his attitude toward her father had impressed her. What if he should be in the right? She recalled her own premonition of ill-fortune the night of the President's visit to the theatre. A tremor, partly from cold, partly from nervousness, ran over her. She went over to the fire, which blazed up brightly.

"I will give you the money to-morrow," he said, coldly, "but there must come an end to this. I have let you treat me too long with contempt. In indulging you, in never contradicting you when you are wrong, I have lost your respect. What sort of a position do I hold in this house? It was a mistake when I consented to our living with your father."

His sternness was so surprising that she looked at him with a certain freshness of feeling and saw in his face, what her indifferent eyes had long ceased to see, the authoritative strength of the soldier, the ability of the man who had made his millions.

He saw admiration and warmth come into her expression, saw her arms half-extended to him, her lips part to speak, and his heart almost stood still. Did she then love him? Had tenderness at last wakened in her? He would not move. She, she, herself, must make the first advance.

"Tom," said her eager voice, "why don't

you make more of yourself? Suppose the worst happened and father lost the nomination. You are young and stand a better chance. There is nothing, nothing, that you could not attain to with your money and ability and me to help you."

He pushed her away. "Don't come near me. You—you have no heart. Get into bed. You will catch cold standing here with bare feet."

His strange manner frightened her. She was glad to get into bed again, and draw the warm coverlet over her, for she was shivering. She heard him cover up the coals with ashes and then come and lie down beside her. There was a long silence.

Suddenly she put out her hand and laid it on his eyes.

"You are crying," she said.

"It is nothing," he answered, huskily, "nothing. I thought, what if one of us should die before we had come to a more perfect understanding."

Chapter XVI

DURING the anxious weeks that preceded the Ohio Republican convention, Portia spent much of her time with Countess Polonski, whom she found the most cheerful of companions, full of wit and delightful impulses.

The Secretary, too, admired her after his shy, cold fashion, and once, when she dined informally with them, he read aloud to her from his large calf-bound edition of Burns. His daughter had brought him the book from Scotland, and he prized it highly. He read the dialect so miserably that his guest could not understand it, but he was pleased by her attention. He missed Virginia more than he fully realised.

"If I wish to talk to you, the next time you come I shall have to have you for lunch," remarked Portia. "Father enjoys seeing you so much that he allows me no visit with you whatever. Do come out early next Tuesday and spend the day."

It rained dismally on that day, but her guest arrived warm and bright, with her work-bag on her arm and a jar of marmalade for the Secretary.

"Taste it," she said, "and see if it is too bitter. The count likes it so. I made it myself. You don't know how domestic I've become since we moved into that delightful old-fashioned house. The furniture is so homelike. I found a trunk of dolls and toys and books up in the garret. And I'm perfectly sure that the reason the springs are broken in that old horse-hair lounge in the hall is because some child jumped on it." She was taking off her hat and cloak as she spoke, and as she finished she turned to her hostess with a smile. "I did the most ridiculous thing on my way here. I drove to the greenhouse and ordered the flower-boxes and hanging-baskets for my balcony to be sent up as soon as the warm weather comes. Of course I am weeks too early, but I thought they would be ready in time at least."

They lunched in the little breakfast-room, as none of the men in the family was at home, and then went up-stairs to Mrs. Matthews's apartment. The countess drew up a chair to the window and took out her embroidery.

Portia rocked lazily to and fro in front of the fire with her hands clasped behind her head. "You may not wish my advice," she remarked, "but I think those queer, purplish tones are hideous. If I were embroidering that rose I should make it red or pink, not such an outlandish shade."

"You have all the instincts of a rustic," retorted her friend.

Portia laughed. "At least," she said, "I don't put out my eyes over a piece of embroidery that will be faded by its third washing."

"I'm not concerned with the result," answered the countess, serenely. "I am absorbed in the joy of creating a beautiful thing." She drew closer to the window, for the day was dark. Her face, too sombre in repose, too eager in conversation, betokened a strong mind impatient of mere pleasure. "Portia," she said, suddenly, "don't you ever get tired of society? I do. I get tired of laughing with fools. I am sick of mere feeding. I am worn out with entertaining others and putting on such airs of being entertained by them in turn."

"Society is not composed of fools entirely," Portia answered. "You must have met many brilliant men."

"They have been generally more brilliant than good, and they ended by being bores," answered the Russian. "I would rather read or talk to a child than to them. I admire your father. The other evening when he was reading to me from the works of that queer poet —"

"He wasn't queer," interrupted Portia, laughing; "it was father's awful reading."

"I thought what a good face your father had, so free from any tracery of mean or wicked thoughts. He seemed so simple and childlike with all his greatness. The tears kept coming to my eyes. I was very sad that evening. You are so much younger than I by nature. It's the American blood in you. You Americans are always cheerful and always worried. Now, I'm not worried, but I haven't your cheerfulness. As for brilliant men, to hark back to the never-worn subject of men, I've reached the point when I can no longer tell the difference between a man of genius and a fool! I'm tired of men, Portia."

"What do you want to do?" asked Mrs. Matthews.

"I want to be a beggar and sit on sunny street corners and watch the world go by, and not have to get up and dance to its fiddling."

"You're bound to make yourself out a philosopher, which you're not," laughed her friend. "Think how your back would ache sitting on the hard curbstone, and how cold you'd be without your furs. Besides, you couldn't afford to cast them aside as they are so becoming, and no King Cophetua would look at you without them."

"Do you think stuffed chairs satisfy my soul?" cried the countess.

"I was speaking of your back," retorted

Portia, "and I can assure you that chairs which aren't stuffed don't satisfy mine."

The other dropped her work into her lap and stared out of the window at the gray world. She sighed. Much travel, many changes, had not quelled her restlessness. The count was a materialist, and his amused cynicism had long since destroyed her religion. And having once lost her early trust, she found that, while she was again intellectually a believer, those early fresh impulses of faith had departed. She longed to be satisfied with that spiritual food for which, however, she had lost all taste.

The rain dashed against the window in a violent gust of wind. "Portia," she said, a gleam of merriment in her dark eyes, "I could, indeed, be a proud and lonely soul sitting on the curbstone as long as the sun shone, but if it began to rain like this, I should most certainly begin to hope King Cophetua would come riding by on his milk-white, velvet-caparisoned steed and rescue me."

"Don't hope for any such romance," her hostess rejoined. "It would probably be only Senator Chadwick who would come tripping and sliding along the wet sidewalk, and catching sight of you, stop to offer you his arm and umbrella."

"How awful!" cried the countess. "Have you heard from him lately?"

"Only the marked copies of papers he sends to the house, reporting his speeches. He is still canvassing the northern part of the State, but of course his time is limited. He can't be gone longer than ten days while the Senate is in session."

Some one tapped lightly on the door, which was ajar. "May I come in?" asked Mrs. Haas. "The man told me you were both here, so I ran right up-stairs. Isn't it horrid weather? I brought you some lilacs that have been forced in the hothouse."

Mrs. Matthews unwrapped the tissue-paper from the flowers and put them in water. "How like you to select these! Why, they have no perfume. I'd as soon think of longing for cherries at Christmas time as having lilacs before the last of April or May. Thank you very much, my dear."

"Indeed you needn't thank me," retorted Mrs. Haas, "for I've changed my mind about giving them to you. I see perfectly well you don't appreciate them. I'm sorry I spent my money now. What a lovely rose, Countess Polonski! That shade of green is simply delicious!"

"Green," echoed her hostess, "I call that a sickly gray."

Mrs. Haas flung off her long coat and sat down by the fire. "Is that a box of marshmallows on the table? If you'll give me a

long pin I'll toast them. These coals are just right."

She looked like a child sitting on the rug in front of the fire. Her white cloth dress, trimmed with gold braid, had a splash of mud on the hem.

"I think it is outrageous for you to wear that beautiful dress on a day like this," said Portia, going over to her dressing-table for a brush. "On second thought, I think we'd better let it dry first. Then it will come off easily."

Mrs. Haas shook her mass of hair loose about her face and looked up at Mrs. Matthews like a wilful child. "I always put on my nicest things gloomy days so I won't be blue. Wilhelm —"

"Wilhelm," echoed Countess Polonski, "it is always Wilhelm." She had come over to the fire, and now she stooped and patted the other's cheek. "I am not laughing at you. I think it is very sweet." She stood erect again and put her foot on the fender, lifting her skirt a few inches, and gazing down with her kindly smile. There was often a look of benignity in her face.

"Don't think you two are never going to get any mallows," spoke Mrs. Haas.

"We are not anxious," answered Mrs. Matthews, "as yet you have only eaten two without offering us any."

"Well, I ate the first one to see if it were good, and the second one was scorched. Here, take this. Don't burn yourself. I have a piece of news for you, Portia. Otherwise I wouldn't have come out here in this rain; but Wilhelm bundled me into a hack and sent me out." Her pale little face, to which the warm reflection brought only the faintest colour, looked up tantalisingly.

"I think you are positively uncanny, Elise," cried Mrs. Matthews. "How can you sit there toasting those marshmallows when you were sent out here with a message for me? What is it?"

"It's Greenleaf. He told my husband that he had become — Oh, dear, dear, there goes that marshmallow! That was all your fault, because you insisted on talking to me while I was toasting them. And there are only three left in the box. Just look at that sizzling on the coals. Isn't that mean!"

Countess Polonski laughed, and in another moment Portia joined her.

"Do you think you are acting in a very nice way, Elise?" she asked.

Mrs. Haas looked up elfishly from under her red hair that shone like copper in the firelight. Then she too began to laugh. "I was only trying to tease you. Mr. Greenleaf has become more than ever convinced of your father's fitness for the Presidential chair, and

he is going to make some speeches for him, go about to different towns, you know, and all that sort of thing. Here, take this quick before it drops off, or I'll eat it myself. There, I had to eat it or it would have fallen. Of course it will mean a tremendous triumph to have Greenleaf interest himself as much as that. Why, more people than we have any idea of just swear by him."

"Oh," cried Portia, "I wonder if father knows. I can scarcely wait until he gets home to tell him. He will be so happy! How could you keep from telling me at once? If I don't show that girl of his more than a good time. I'll do my best to get her well married."

"I smell a mouse," said Mrs. Haas, with a quick glance of her green eyes that could be so shrewd. "Out with it, Portia. What did you do to Greenleaf? I'm determined to know."

Mrs. Matthews wished she hadn't spoken, but there was no way now of backing out. "Wait till I order some tea and then I'll tell you the whole story."

"I shall tell Wilhelm even if it is a secret," put in Mrs. Haas, obstinately. "I'm not going to promise anything."

"Well, if you don't tell any one else, it's all right," answered Portia, easily. She had not the slightest fear that Countess Polonski would ever repeat anything.

"I am quite interested," said the latter. "Have you been turning lobbyist?"

Mrs. Haas put her finger on her lips. "Hush," her bright, mischievous eyes glanced from one to the other of her friends, "hush. Only common, horrid women whom we would never know do lobbying." She pulled down her mouth prudishly. "But tell us, dear, how you influenced old Daddy Longlegs. Have you met his daughter?"

The three were an hour or more sipping their tea, laughing and chatting. Mrs. Haas paraded across the room to show them how Greenleaf's daughter walked, after Portia finished telling them of her lunch in the market with the great editor.

"You are such a fraud," said Countess Polonski, "no one who meets you for the first time out in society, with your far-away look and white gowns, is ever anything but awed by your transcendently spiritual look. You seem a kind of transfigured angel. That poor girl! Is she really as awkward as that? Awkward people are always pathetic."

"Every bit and worse, with a horrid complexion," she answered, promptly.

"Both can be remedied," added Portia, cheerfully. "I stand ready to do my duty to the full."

Mrs. Haas sank languidly into her chair. "I must tell you what fun I had with Wilhelm

last night. He can't bear a large picture hat with plumes on me. He thinks it doesn't look nice on the street. He'd have me in a bonnet like an old lady, with strings under my chin. So I thought I'd cure him. I bought a big black velvet hat. Last night was his easy night at the office, so I met him at dinner with it on, and then went to make some calls with him. He was sulky. When we came home I undressed with it on, and when he came up-stairs I was kneeling at my prayers still with that hat on. I heard him slam the door and go out. After awhile he came up again, and I knew by his step that he repented his temper and expected me to be in tears. And there I was sitting up against the pillows in bed with my eyes closed, my hands peacefully folded like a saint's on my breast, and with my beautiful hat still on my head!"

While they were laughing General Matthews entered abruptly.

He nodded to Mrs. Haas as he tossed a paper into his wife's lap. "Read that."

She glanced up, and realised with a sudden sinking of the heart that he had been drinking. He had ignored Countess Polonski, whom he could not have helped seeing, but she had too much tact to notice his lack of courtesy in his present condition. She spread the paper open in her lap.

"I will read it in a few minutes. I am busy just now. Is that all?"

"I told you to read it, didn't I?" he cried.

Fearful of a scene, she lifted the paper, but for the first moments she was so angry that she could not see the printed letters clearly. Then she saw it was an article referring to her as a lobbyist. The paper's policy had been bitterly hostile to her father from the first, and referred to him contemptuously as a self-seeking aristocrat with no sympathy for the people. A wave of indignation swept over her. He, an aristocrat! A farmer's boy, making his own fortune and maintaining in his high position the simplest manner of living; who came more from the people than he? "Because he is not a Hoosier in his manner and looks he is to be insulted!" she thought, bitterly. Then she suddenly remembered the present situation, and that the three people in the room were watching her.

"Is this all?" she asked her husband, coldly.

"All?" he echoed, furiously, "is it not enough that we should both be so insulted? If you would take my advice you would see less of Chadwick and this woman here."

"Tom," she said, slowly, "look at me. You don't know what you are saying. You are drunk. You hear me? If you do not

leave my room at once, I will ring the bell for your servant to help you."

For a moment their two wills contended silently. Then his broke, and he turned away with a slouching step.

She had forgotten her guests. She could only think how terrible the incident was. Mechanically she commenced to fold the paper. Her eye caught the headline of a short paragraph.

"Tom, Tom, Tom!" she cried. "Oh, come back! Come back! Philip La Cerf is dead."

Matthews turned with his hand on the door-knob. "I heard it this noon," he said, dully. "He was shot through the heart."

And he went out and closed the door.

Countess Polonski had put on her hat and was now fastening the clasps of her cloak with trembling fingers.

Those trembling fingers, struggling ineffectually to fasten the cloak, recalled Portia to herself, and she rose and pushed her friend down into her chair.

"Katrina, if you go now I never shall forgive you. Tom has been drinking. He will apologise."

Her friend caught her hands, lifting her face eagerly. "Do not worry," she said. "I understand. Do not mind my tears. I am nervous. I am not well. You must not let

him drink so. He is not happy. That is why. I have seen it. Oh, my dear friend, if I had a husband as good as yours, as true and kind—I have wanted to say this to you so long—I should not mind about politics, nor riches, nor society, nor anything but him. I should be proud just to mind his home, to help him, to take care of our children, if we had any.” She withdrew her hands and pressed them tight together. A bright spot of colour burned on either cheek.

“Is it as bad as that?” cried Mrs. Matthews. “Is your husband such a brute as that?”

Countess Polonski nodded. She sat up in her chair, straight and proud. “I wish he were dead,” she said, with great and sudden calmness.

Mrs. Haas was watching them like a frightened child. She was terrified by these strange passions and wanted to run away.

Portia walked over to the window and stood staring out at the gray landscape. La Cerf dead! He had consumption, anyway. He would not have lived. But this was awful! Shot through the heart. How miserable the drizzling rain and the sighing poplars! Through the background of her thought sounded the slouching step of her husband as when he turned and left the room. Was his will failing him? Had he lost the decided pace of the soldier?

A carriage drove rapidly away from the house down the wet driveway between the two lines of Lombardy poplars.

She looked quickly back of her into the room. She and the countess were alone.

And, suddenly, Portia found herself laughing, laughing until the tears rolled down her face, and she was obliged to sit down in the rocking-chair.

"Forgive me, Katrina," she cried. "I assure you laughter is furthest from my thoughts, but that little fool has run away from us. Isn't it ghastly?"

There was no answering smile on her friend's face. She rose. "I can't find my veil," and she began searching for it around the room.

"Here it is," said Portia, lifting the filmy lace from the floor. The look in the other's face sobered her. "You are ill?"

"Yes," answered Countess Polonski, "I am ill. I must go home. No, I want nothing, thank you."

Portia returned to the window to watch anxiously for her father. As soon as he came, she would have the carriage return to town with her guest. She thought of Mrs. Haas with contempt. Why had not she thought to invite her friend to drive in with her? She despised her with the scorn of the strong nature for the incapable and selfish.

"Shall I drive in with you, Katrina?" she asked.

"Oh, no, thank you," the countess answered her. "It is one of my nervous headaches. All I need is sleep." She had recovered herself and smiled brightly.

Chapter XVII

SHE passed a dreary evening. General Matthews did not come down to dinner, and she made the excuse that he was ill with a cold and had gone to bed.

Sickness in his family always wakened the more gentle and affectionate traits in the Secretary, and he proposed that they should spend part of the evening up-stairs in his son-in-law's room. He liked a sick-room with its atmosphere of tea and toast and flowers and cheerful reading at the bedside of the invalid.

"We will read a chapter or two in Dickens. And you might bring your sewing up, Portia."

"It is very nice of you to think of Tom," she answered, "but I know he wishes to sleep, and as for myself I have some letters that must be written."

"You and I might have a game of chess, sir," proposed Prentiss.

"I won't let you beat me this time," said the Secretary. He was in the best of spirits. Haas had called on him that afternoon, and told him of Greenleaf's decision to "stump" several States for him. He turned to Portia. "By the way, I had a letter from Virginia,

and she is worried for fear the ribbon she tied about her kitten's neck might accidentally get drawn tighter and choke it. Perhaps you'd better see about it, my dear."

"I'm sorry," she said, "but I gave it away to some children who were having a picnic over in the woods. I couldn't have it around under my feet any longer."

Prentiss laughed abruptly, and, glancing up, she encountered the only look of anger he had ever given her.

She wondered if he knew of La Cerf's death.

Secretary West had seen the notice but had forgotten it for the time being. The Indian's death seemed fully as tragic but of no more particular moment than that of any other soldier.

When Mrs. Matthews finally went up-stairs that night, she found the room dark. She spoke to her husband, but he did not reply, and she judged that he was asleep. The lilacs Mrs. Haas had brought had some perfume after all, a sweet, faint, oppressive odour that made the air heavy. She opened the window and flung them out, then lighted the lamp. She had no desire to go near Matthews, and so, after partially undressing, she put on a wrapper, turned the lamp low, and left the room. At the farther end of the wide, old-fashioned hall was a horse-hair lounge, that

was sometimes used as a bed when the house was full of guests. She wrapped the afghan around her and lay down. There was a faint light from a bracketed lamp half-way down the hall, and it cast dreary shadows. The lounge was hard and uncomfortable; the rain outside beat down dismally. Her spirits were at too low an ebb to revive, even at the recollection of the good news Mrs. Haas had brought. She seldom became angry, but when she did it made her almost physically ill, and bitter thoughts of her husband filled her mind to the exclusion of all else. She knew this was a single offence, that he probably would not become an habitual drinker, but her pride was deeply wounded. He had insulted her friend, owing to his drunken condition. This fact filled her with such contempt that her anger turned to a kind of physical loathing, so that she wished she might not see him again for weeks or months.

"Why doesn't he go back to his brigade?" she asked, aloud. "He's well enough. I wish he would go." Panic followed the wish. It was she who had persuaded La Cerf to go, and he had been shot. Suppose Matthews should return, and — She pressed her hands together in vain anxiety to unsay the wish. Should fate take her at her spoken words — "I am getting superstitious. It is this miserable night. How I wish it would clear away

and I could see the stars. I believe I hate rain as much as I do poor people when they intrude on me." Back of the sofa was a window, and she drew aside the curtain and looked out into the night. She could see nothing, but only heard the steady downpour. The blackness imparted a feeling of suffocation. Her father was probably in bed, reading, and she had no doubt that his mood was one of contentment, and that the rain was pleasant to his ears, and sounded the line from the Benedicite, "O ye Showers and Dew, bless ye the Lord; praise him, and magnify him for ever."

"I wish I had his sense of sublimity," ran her thoughts, "but religion brings me nothing, and I should die of melancholy to read the Bible every night as he does. I wonder that he can be so ambitious. It would kill any spirit I had. If I'd had any sense I would have gone and spent the night with Katrina Polonski, especially as Polonski, himself, is in New York just now."

She turned restlessly, trying to make herself comfortable on the slippery sofa. "It's Tom who deserves to be out here, not I. Poor Virginia!" This last with a twinge of compunction, for, whenever a full household had demanded an extra room, it was Virginia who was turned out from her little bed and made to sleep in the hall. Portia felt a return of happy humour, and laughed softly. "I sup-

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pose it's wholesome to have to take a dose of the medicine one prescribes for others, but this one experience of trying to sleep here is enough for me. If I go back to my own comfortable bed I sacrifice my pride, if I stay here I sacrifice my comfort."

She sat up on the edge of the sofa. Her happy spirits had revived for no reason except, perhaps, a natural reaction from the gloom and depression of the past several hours. Her husband's offence no longer seemed particularly serious. He was not well, anyway, and the news of La Cerf's death, combined with the insulting allusion to herself in the afternoon paper, had made him forget himself. She was not at all distressed by the reference to her in the paper as a lobbyist. Her position was so strong as to make the insult ineffectual.

A delicate sound blended with the beating of the rain. It came so softly as for the moment to seem mysterious to her, like a strain of fairy music. Then she recognised it. Prentiss, in the drawing-room, was playing the little dance of nymphs that he had composed for an episode in one of his plays. He played often late at night, privileged to do so because none in the household was ever disturbed by it. It was a relief after his long hours of work. But Portia had often observed that he played most when he was troubled, as if the music brought him consolation. She smiled in sym-

pathy with the elfin dance, keeping time with her foot.

It died away. All at once like a knell a sombre note was struck, and she started, scarcely able to believe her hearing. Prentiss was playing the snake-dance that La Cerf had played.

"Then he knows that he is dead," she thought. "It is on his mind."

To listen to the music was almost more than she could endure, yet she could not help listening with a strained eagerness. She almost wondered if Prentiss's mind were affected. He was improvising, but he never lost that harsh insistent note.

"It is a funeral march," Portia cried, aloud; "why doesn't he stop?" She spoke as if there were some one to hear and answer her question. "Why doesn't he stop?"

She wondered why she did not rise and go to the head of the stairs and call down to him. Why didn't her father hear and open his door, and make some protest? But the music fascinated her as it had not when he, who was now dead, had first played it for her. It seemed as if the very soul of the Indian were speaking through that medium of sound,—repellent, haughty, with a wild sadness, barbarous, then a sudden burst of savage exultation followed by absolute silence. It left her shivering, drained of all power to feel, her mind wondering vaguely

at the talent Prentiss possessed. She heard him come up-stairs, slowly, like an old man. Instead of going straight to his room, he came on down the hall, and she shrank back into the shadow. He opened the door of Virginia's room, and a gust of wind blew out and down the hall, extinguishing the low flame of the lamp in the bracket on the side wall. She heard him close the window which some careless servant had left open, and she fancied that he spoke some words aloud. Then he came out, stepping by her in the darkness, and walked back down the hall. There was the blue spurt of a match, the quick flame, and then she saw his pale face clearly as he reached up and lighted the lamp anew. Somehow he looked the Prentiss of the old days when he had loved her. How intellectual his profile was. There was a will to match her own. Matthews, foolish, loving, intemperate, was a boy beside him. Would she have been happier married to Prentiss? Would life have been more stimulating because of the unending struggle there would have been between them? But he was born to be a poor man; as it was now, the world was open to her adventurous spirit. When he had gone into his own room and closed the door she rose with a sigh of relief. "Let me but once get back to Tom," she addressed herself with energy. "Thank heavens that he drinks too much, that he's

hateful as he can be at times, that I long to shake him this very moment! He's at least human, and doesn't prowl around the house like a genius gone mad!"

Very peace itself seemed to descend upon her as she entered her own room and closed the door. The air was cool and sweet; the oppressive odour of the lilacs was gone; the shaded lamp burning steadily seemed like a quiet friend awaiting her coming. She turned the flame a shade higher, and stepped over to the bed to see if Matthews were still asleep.

His pillow had fallen to the floor, and he rested uncomfortably on the wrinkled sheet. He was lying on his wounded side, and in his stupor could not rouse himself to turn over. His thick blond hair was rumpled, his mouth drooped, and he was frowning slightly even in his heavy sleep. Part of the bed-covering dragged on the floor.

She passed her arm under his shoulders and raised him slightly, for she was a strong woman, and drew the wrinkled sheet up taut and slipped the pillow under his head, turning him on his well side as she let him lie down again. His breathing grew easy at once. She brought him a glass of water, and roused him sufficiently to make him drink it. He took it all thirstily, looking at her with dazed, unconscious eyes, then sank back easily on his pillow, and in a

moment was sleeping quietly. For a moment she stood watching him, and then she bent and kissed him. Lying there, sick, boyish, troubled, he went to her heart.

She wakened with the first rays of the sun, refreshed, eager to dress and get the sweetness of the early morning after the rain.

As she stepped out upon the verandah the air was almost springlike. She went around to the bay window, where, in a sheltered nook, were a few English violets protected by an old window-pane. It was time to remove the glass, and in doing so she spied several of the purple blossoms, and picked them for her father. How they would delight him! His years on the farm as a boy had left him with an aversion for the hard physical labour the life entailed, but he retained his appreciation of the delights the country afforded. Nature appealed to the mingled poetical and religious emotions in him. It was otherwise with his daughter. She loved the homely things of life, the making of butter and cheese, the milking time, the smell of the fresh earth beneath the plough, and, lovely as the blossoming trees were, she felt a more complete satisfaction when the fruit was transformed into jellies and preserves to stock her storeroom.

A negro was making his way over to the chicken yard with brush and pail to do some whitewashing. She went over to watch him;

then, obeying her impulse, sent him for a basket and gathered the eggs from the nests herself. She experienced a childlike delight at every fresh discovery, and she called the darkey in to see one nest which contained fifteen eggs.

As she came out she saw her father standing on the side verandah and waved her hand to him. She made a pretty picture in the fresh day, wearing an old straw garden-poke tied under her chin, a lavender morning gown of an elegance out of keeping with her shabby poke and clumsy gloves.

The Secretary stepped down to meet her. She kissed him good-morning, and fastened the tiny cluster of violets in his coat.

"Come," she said, "it isn't nearly breakfast-time yet and I have something to show you. It's the old cherry-tree behind the barn that I had to have chopped down last fall in order to build out."

He followed her until she paused beside the fallen tree and pointed out to him the swelling buds. "Think of the vitality the old tree had, father. It won't be long before it will blossom."

"Dear, dear," said the Secretary, "somehow it makes me feel a little sad."

"It does seem too bad," Portia rejoined. "These buds have come out so bravely and will blossom the first warm days without the

least idea that they never can be cherries." She picked off several of the twigs.

"There is a real beauty about it, though," moralised the Secretary. "Look at the size of the trunk. What fruit that old tree has yielded in its day! And now, stricken down, it puts forth these last blossoms, that will vanish like the snow and leave no mark. It is not unlike love in old age."

"Mercy on us," cried his daughter, "I hope you're not thinking of another widow, father."

For a moment he was annoyed. He thought she referred more often than was tactful to that trying episode. But his irritation was quickly past. "No, my dear, I was thinking of your mother and how the memory of her was coming back upon me after all these years just as those buds are beginning to flower on that tree." His fine eyes held his rarest expression. "Lately I am never able to imagine myself a middle-aged man when I think of her. I seem young to myself and almost her age."

"Don't I make you feel young?" asked Portia, mischievously.

"No," he retorted, drily, "you make me feel rather more than middle-aged. Sometimes when with you I am not sure but that I have reached my second childhood."

General Matthews came down to breakfast. He looked pale and entirely self-composed, but

he had no spirit with which to meet his wife's evident determination to act as if nothing unusual had occurred. His self-respect smarted under her good-nature, which to him took on the semblance of contempt, and he was still depressed by La Cerf's death. After the Secretary and Prentiss retired he remained at the table for his second cup of coffee and to look over the morning paper. But though he read the news with interest he was conscious of a feeling of constriction at his heart.

His strange manner puzzled her and chilled any impulse of forgiveness and good-fellowship with which she had begun the day.

So she decided to leave him to his sulks and go into town to see Countess Polonski. When she arrived at the house she had to ring several times before she was admitted. The door was opened suddenly by the count himself.

"I thought you were in New York," she cried, in surprise.

"I came back yesterday afternoon," he answered. He was in his dressing-gown and slippers and unshaven. "Throw over me the kindly mantle of your charity, Mrs. Matthews, and do not observe my appearance. My servant was impertinent and I had to dismiss him without warning. Come up-stairs. We were just about to have our coffee in the library. I am fond of that room as it gets the morning sun."

As she preceded him up the stairs she felt that something disastrous had occurred. It was in the very air as though the house itself were charged with a secret. Polonski's powerful personality seemed to envelop her, and she looked ahead eagerly to meet the relief of his wife's genuine and affectionate greeting.

Chapter XVIII

THE door into the library was open. As she stepped within she noticed the odour of coffee and saw a samovar of heavy Russian brass on the writing-table in the centre of the room. The blue flame from the alcohol cup was burning brightly, and Count Polonski hastened to extinguish it.

"Half a moment's extra boiling and the flavour would have been ruined," he exclaimed.

The room was in confusion. The desk was littered with letters and papers pushed aside to make room for the samovar. A blue cloisonné tray which she had often admired was filled with the ashes and stubs of numberless cigars. She noticed drops of wax on the green felt of the table as if the person writing had either been careless or in great haste in sealing letters. The candles were burned down to the sockets, and she remembered that the count preferred them to lamps. Could he have been at work all night? The pillows and afghan on the lounge were in disorder as if some one had been lying down.

"Katrina will be here in a few minutes," he said. "That rascal I dismissed made coffee

to perfection." His plump deft hands fluttered over the desk, putting things to rights, and clearing more of a space for the breakfast dishes.

"Will you sit at the window and watch for a milk-wagon? If you see one coming tell me and I'll try to get some cream. Otherwise we shall have to have our coffee clear. It is quite spoiled for madame unless she has her cream."

She cleared away some garments that were on a chair and sat down at the window. "What has become of the milkman who came to your rescue in the park?"

"Oh, he probably was here early this morning, but there was no one up to let him in," he answered.

She caught herself just in time not to utter the question that rose to her lips. Had they then dismissed all their servants?

"Why, of course, how stupid of me!" she exclaimed. "My carriage is right outside. I'll send the coachman to the creamery. There's one a block over on the avenue. I wonder if you would like some fresh eggs with your breakfast. They are some I gathered this morning myself, and I was taking them to the hospital."

"Here," he said, "here is the key to the front door. Throw it out of the window to the fellow and tell him to come up. I've never been myself since that night I spent in the

park. I have a stiff knee. Tell him to buy a morning paper. I hope I am not robbing the invalids at the hospital."

"I am a most bountiful provider," she answered, smiling. "I'll just run down to the door. Tobias is a stupid old fellow. He would be sure to miss catching the key, and would spend an hour hunting for it, while I would meanwhile be making a tableau of myself in the window trying to point it out to him." She caught up a card-basket and hurried out of the room. "I shall have to take this to bring the eggs up."

As she came up the stairs again after getting the eggs and sending the old coachman for the cream, she glanced curiously down the hall, wondering why her friend delayed, and how long the *tête-à-tête* with her husband was to last.

"The cream will be here in a few minutes," she said. "Have you tried rubbing your knee? I believe in rubbing and hot applications for a stiff joint. I have a very efficacious liniment which I will send in to you when I get home. I trust you won't be offended if I confess that it is a remedy I have used on a sprained horse. It's a wonder you were not really ill after such a night."

"Ah, my dear Mrs. Matthews," he cried, eloquently, "I have spent far less peaceful ones in my day! You would not believe me,

but I enjoyed that night. It was so many years since I had been able to afford the time to watch the stars. I tried to recall that classic you English-speaking people are so fond of, and which I understand even your young men in love recite to their sweethearts. Something like this, but there, I've forgotten it. Anyway it was all 'twinkle, twinkle, twinkle,' and something about a diamond. Then I amused myself with the policeman. As he followed his beat around and around the square, I kept in step with him inside the picket fence, and warned him that if he leant up against a post to sleep I'd report him to the authorities the next day for carelessness while on duty. This was the first of my remarks that struck him as sane, and he was on the ace of letting me out when I lost my case by cursing him in Russian."

Portia laughed.

"But come, give me a bit of fresh gossip for a relish with my coffee," he continued. "After severe mental strain (I have been working all night, with the exception of an hour's sleep), nothing amuses and entertains me more than a little scandal. I have found Haas an entertaining fellow. He knows the ins and outs of everything. Have you seen him within the last two or three days? No? Well, then, I probably know something that you don't, for I saw him last night."

"The water for the eggs is boiling," she said. Any curiosity she might have felt with another person was lost in her dislike of him.

"I am waiting for the cream to come before dropping them in," he replied, taking an easy-chair and leaning back wearily.

He took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes with his hand. The morning light revealed pitilessly his puffy yellow face with its starting beard, his black disordered hair and light protuberant eyes. Despite his look of dissipation, she was impressed anew by his appearance of strength, his look of predominating intellect, his large head and shoulders, and the massive throat the turned-down collar of his dressing-gown exposed.

If Katrina had wearied of him, Mrs. Matthews did not wonder that she cared nothing more for the society of brilliant men.

Polonski put on his glasses. "I am as blind as a bat without them." He smiled. "How charming you are," he said, with real spontaneity, "with your early rising and your gift of new-laid eggs. You have brought all the freshness and sweetness of the country into this dreary room." His smile, his manner, was without offence. He continued to look at her as pleasantly, as impersonally, as if she were a rose whose colour had taken his fancy.

"If Katrina does not come within a few minutes I shall go," she thought.

A door opened and shut in the upper hall.

"If that is you, my child," called out the count, "will you please go down and take the cream and paper from Mrs. Matthews's coachman, who is just coming?"

When Countess Polonski entered a moment later with the can and newspaper, Portia was shocked by the change in her, although she smiled and greeted her friend as usual. It was as if the lurking weariness, the suppressed sadness of her nature, had become her dominant expression.

"I did not mean to keep you waiting so long," she explained, "but I had been busy packing, and I was just beginning to dress for the day when you came. I had on my wrapper."

"Packing!" echoed Portia. "Are you going away?"

"Yes," answered the count; "I have been called home rather suddenly. Have you read the paper yet?"

"No, I haven't," she answered.

"Well, then, Katrina shall read aloud to us while we have our coffee," he continued. "I have kept it in the hot water, so it is not chilled. Look," holding up an egg, "see how pretty and pink the light shows through." He rubbed it down his cheek. "It is still warm and smooth as a pearl." He dropped it into the kettle. "How many shall I cook for you?"

"I don't want any breakfast, thank you," answered his wife, "but I will take a cup of coffee. Portia, you will not mind our reading aloud?"

"Not a bit," answered Mrs. Matthews. "I can stay only a few moments longer, anyway. Yes, I will take cream."

Countess Polonski read well with a slight foreign accent. Her husband, watch in hand, timed the boiling of the eggs, and listened attentively. He was a born diplomat, and had the political situation of every country at his finger-tips. He watched the movements of the nations in the mood of a chess-player.

"You are cold, my child," he said to his wife.

The newspaper she held shook. She laid it down. "I am unable to read. My eyes hurt me."

Mrs. Matthews did not dare look at her. She feared she might see tears in those dark eyes. She put her cup and saucer on the table. "It was delicious. I wish I might wait for a second cup, but I really must be going. I wanted Katrina to go for a drive with me, but she is too busy getting ready to go, of course. You must both dine with us before you start."

"I will see you to the door," said the count. "Wait a second until I take out the eggs." As he followed her into the hall

he continued, "I have always maintained that the length of time eggs should be boiled should be in accordance with their weight. The custom of dropping them in for the specified number of minutes without any regard to their size is barbarous.

"What a lovely air!" he exclaimed, when he had opened the door.

"It is beautiful out," she assented. "Good morning." She felt as if the door were shut on her with almost indecent haste. Her face burned with anger. "He could scarcely get rid of me quickly enough," she said to herself. "Why did I ever go in there this morning? Poor Katrina! I could shake Tom when I think of his rudeness to her yesterday. She has enough to put up with."

As she stepped into her carriage she glanced up at the windows of the house. "I wish I hadn't given him those eggs," she murmured; "it actually irritates me to think that he will enjoy them."

Some blocks on she saw Mrs. Haas, and stopped. "Elise," she called, "come here. I want to speak to you. I will take you wherever you wish as soon as I have left these things at the hospital."

"I was wishing I might see you," remarked Mrs. Haas, as she got in and tucked the robe well about her. "Isn't the day heavenly after the downpour we had yesterday? I sha'n't go

into the hospital with you. I am sorry for sick people, but they are repulsive to me."

"Tell me what has happened at the Polonskis'," demanded Mrs. Matthews. "I know that you know, for he told me this morning that your husband had been there last night. Katrina looks like death."

"You don't mean to say you've been there this morning!" cried her companion. "How unfortunate! For my part I hope I may never see her again."

"What are you talking about?" asked Mrs. Matthews. "Never see whom again? Do you mean Katrina?"

"I suppose you may as well call her that. You certainly can't refer to her as the Countess Polonski."

"Do you mean that he is an impostor?"

"Scarcely that," answered Mrs. Haas, "although he might be said to have imposed on the national courtesy. But she is an adventuress."

"Go on," said Mrs. Matthews. She felt sick all over. And Polonski had had the audacity to ask his wife to read the paper aloud!

"It seems it leaked out the way those things always do. We never knew it, but there was a suspicion that a lot of gambling went on under Polonski's roof, that one young fellow was cheated, and forged to pay his debt.

His family made it right with his firm, and sent him abroad to remain until the trouble had blown over."

"I know who it was," said Portia, "a foolish-faced boy, disagreeable as he could be. I am not surprised that he was cheated. I never knew Polonski had anything to do with that matter, though."

"This boy heard something detrimental to him over in Paris, and wrote home about it. The gossip ran so high that it reached the President's ears, and he had an investigation made. The result of it is that the Russian minister has been summoned home for breach of official etiquette and improper conduct. You know she isn't any more married to him than you are."

Mrs. Matthews's face was white with anger. "It's a pretty serious thing when our government can be so insulted. It shows how we are regarded abroad. Do you suppose that fool would have dared to introduce such a woman at any foreign court?"

"I think he'd dare do anything," answered Mrs. Haas, unconcernedly. "I always thought him very entertaining. I don't think he's a fool."

"I'm not surprised," continued her companion, bitterly. "We're so provincial that foreigners mistake our rawness for stupidity, and think because we are too decent our-

selves to be on the outlook for immorality in others that we are to be imposed upon, and insulted with perfect impunity. I don't wonder. Look at the couple in the White House this moment. I suppose he is a man of ability, but you could scarcely call him a man of fine breeding. It seems to be against our republican institutions of late years to allow gentle people to occupy government positions. How long has Mr. Haas known about this?"

"For some weeks, but he was bound by his word not to let any one suspect that things were going wrong, so he couldn't warn you not to see anything more of them. The matter is to be hushed up as far as possible. Not a line has been given to the press as yet. That is why Count Polonski has been going to and from New York. He's been trying to get influential friends to intercede with the President. But of course it was of no use. Wilhelm was there last night, and he said everything was in confusion, that the count had sent away all the servants so he wouldn't have them gossiping and spying, and he made his wife, only she isn't his wife, write letters and read over and destroy others all night. You know how he depends on her, as his eyesight is so poor. They are now waiting for their passports. Wilhelm only told me last night."

"I wonder he let me in," said Portia, "I

suppose my persistent ringing made him think I might be a messenger."

The carriage stopped in front of the hospital and she let the coachman carry in the basket she had brought. She had no heart to go in and see the soldiers.

Mrs. Haas wiped her eyes. "It has almost made me ill. Wilhelm gave me some money to go shopping to see if it wouldn't cheer me up. I was fond of and I admired her, too, although I can see now that her beauty had no refinement. Only yesterday afternoon we three seemed such good friends. Even if I could find it in my heart to forgive her terrible mistake, I couldn't forget that she had deceived both you and me."

Her friend turned on her irritably. "Have you no common sense, Elise? How was she to avoid deceiving us? It was consistent with the part she had to play. If you once live on a false basis, you'll find it isn't permitted you to be squeamish in regard to lesser virtues. Don't call her to account for deceiving us. That's the least of her fault. I have no doubt that she loved me, and I think she was fond of you."

Mrs. Haas struggled not to cry. "Why do you speak so to me? I haven't done anything, have I? I tried to be charitable. If I saw her on the street I'd speak to her. But I'm ashamed I ever had anything to do with her.

I don't want to see her or touch her, or speak to her ever again."

"Hush," said Mrs. Matthews, "here comes the man back. Where do you want to go? To your dressmaker's? Very well." She gave the direction to the coachman and they drove away. She looked at the other's pale little face under the sweep of the black velvet hat. "She has no blood in her," she thought, and she recalled how her companion had run away the previous afternoon.

"What are you laughing at, Portia?" said Mrs. Haas, brightening. "How did she act when you saw her this morning? Did she seem ashamed?"

Portia thought of the trembling hands that could not hold the paper. "I don't know," she answered, shortly. "I didn't think of prying into her emotions."

She left Mrs. Haas at her dressmaker's, and then went directly back to the house she had so recently left. She wished to see her friend once more to tell her that she knew all, and that she had come to say good-bye. She went up the stairs and rang the bell. After several moments she heard cautious steps inside the hall. There was an almost imperceptible click as a key was turned in the lock. She waited, then realised that she had been locked out. She rapped imperiously on the glass and with growing anger rang and rang the bell.

She stopped in a kind of panic. She could not have explained why, but suddenly she became convinced that Polonski stood behind the door waiting for her to go. She was terrified. Such weakness overcame her that she put her hand on the railing to steady herself. Then she hurried away, unable to control her fear of that presence she knew was watching her from behind the curtained glass. She was conscious of his rage at her persistence, and of his enjoyment over her utter discomfiture.

Chapter XIX

MRS. MATTHEWS went directly home, possessed by the one desire to see her husband. All anger vanished in longing for his sympathy. She thought of his loyalty and candour, his fine bearing as a soldier, his chivalry, and she contrasted him mentally with Polonski. As she recalled the Russian's insolence, his untidy figure, his unwholesome yellow skin, and the disconcerting gaze of his protuberant eyes, a wave of physical revulsion swept over her. Yet she had not experienced this disgust of his personality until now. She had disliked him because she both feared and admired his wit and resented his thinly veiled insolence toward the government, yet she would have scorned herself had she been unjust to the ability of such a man because of his lack of beauty. Now he was hideous in her eyes and she wondered that she had ever so much as touched his hand without shuddering. She had her father's strong and simple ideals of morality and much of his unsuspicious attitude toward the world. The revelation in regard to the life Polonski had been leading trans-

formed him at once into an indecent person, and her face burned at the recollection of the half-hour or so that she had spent with him in the library that very morning. Mingled with this condemnation of him was the irritated consciousness that he had outwitted her and not allowed her to see his wife alone.

"His wife, only she isn't his wife." The phrase Mrs. Haas had used reëchoed in her mind. Toward her whose disgrace was that she was not his wife, Portia felt no bitterness. She had been her only intimate friend, the only woman to whom she had ever accorded a deep personal devotion. Those hours of pleasant friendship were not to be undone. They had engendered moments of spiritual insight much more potent to the revelation of real character than any amount of confession. The disgrace that had befallen did not convince her that Countess Polonski—she would always continue to think of her by that name—was either a bad or sensual woman, and she believed that she had fallen a victim to Polonski through the appeal he made to her intellectually. He must have fascinated her. But how could a woman of intelligence, of native refinement, ever consent to live with a man to whom she was not married? It was impossible for her to conceive of such a temptation.

"I would have left him," she thought, indignantly. "I would have given him my opinion

of him and left, if I had to work my fingers to the bone in somebody's kitchen to get my bread and butter!"

As she puzzled over this, there came the thought that her poor friend might have had the pathetic ideal that long years of companionship might impart some pitiful dignity, some faint reflection of the faithfulness of marriage to the relationship. And this surmise, in spite of her knowledge of such disgrace, awakened in Mrs. Matthews a sad respect for the other's sustained wit and courage. At least she was no coward.

To her relief, her husband was at home. She opened the library door and looked in. He was at the table writing.

"Will you please come up to my room, Tom? I want to speak to you."

He nodded, but did not lift his eyes to meet her gaze. "Is it anything of importance?" he asked. "I am quite busy."

Disturbed as she was, she could not repress a smile at his air of injured dignity. But this exhibition of almost boyish naïveté was refreshing after the insolence she had just encountered. She stood a moment, her hand on the knob of the half-open door. How good he was! How incapable of deception, with his honest frown and refusal to meet her glance! She observed his well-brushed hair, his careful uniform that spoke well for the proverbial

neatness of the military man, and felt an impulse of thankfulness to good providence that he did not go around the house attired in a soiled dressing-gown and slippers.

"Don't let me hurry you," she answered, "I shall be up-stairs in our room anyway, so come when you are through." She drew the door to and he was left alone.

He wrote no more, but sat thinking, holding the pen idly in his fingers. At last he laid it down, put away the paper he had been using, closed the inkstand and straightened the blotter, then rose to leave the room. But when nearly to the door he turned and went back. He would not go up-stairs. He had struggled so often to bear himself coldly toward his wife, and her first smile had invariably melted his mood to tenderness. It should not happen again. His love was getting to be a slavish thing, and unmanned him. But he could not remain in the house with the consciousness that she was in their room waiting for him. He would go for a walk. He went into the hall and put on his hat. He closed the front door softly, dreading that she might hear and call him. The action shamed him. Should a man then be afraid in his own home? He opened the door again and closed it with a decisive bang.

Beginning with the first months of their marriage he had had these moods of despair.

Never had he been first in his wife's thoughts. Her father possessed her supreme devotion. It was his peculiar virtues she loved, his ability that she admired. Her husband was on a lower, if more intimate, plane of her affections. Before his engagement to her, Matthews had not lacked the vanity of a handsome man, and he had been obliged to learn the bitter and disillusionising lesson that his wife regarded his appearance quite impersonally, and failed to appreciate that he might have been attractive to other women. And Matthews, comparing his own wholesome good looks with his father-in-law's magnificent classic type, despaired. He sometimes cherished the extravagant notion of telling his wife she must choose between her father and him.

Against his judgment her faith in West's political future had impressed him these last weeks, and he began to fear that the Secretary might receive the nomination. The probability haunted him. As it was, Portia loved her father to idolatry, and did he fulfil her tremendous ambitions, he knew that he, her husband, would become merely a figurehead in her eyes, a satellite shining in West's reflected glory.

He endeavoured to think that his loyalty to the President, his real conviction that West would not make a good executive, were his sole reasons for desiring his defeat. Why

must the miserable consciousness of an uncontrollable jealousy destroy all the sweetness of virtue in having held steadfastly to his honest opinion and having resisted all appeals from his wife? He almost failed to know himself in the struggles through which he passed. Portia's ambitions had not been without an evil and insidious effect upon him who most of all professed to scorn them. He had been alarmed to find himself speculating upon the honour and glory of the family should West realise success. He imagined his wife presiding at the head of the nation; he saw himself envied because of his near relationship to the President. Was it any wonder that Portia thought their position would be one of unlimited influence? His money would help. He had made one fortune. He could make another. Did not any business venture of his succeed? Was not his the golden touch? He caught himself up. Where was he drifting? What was he thinking?

He stopped still, and looked about him like one dazed.

"My God," he exclaimed, "what am I thinking of!"

He had not realised consciously the road he had taken, nor how far he had walked until now. The Soldiers' Home was less than a mile away. He knew by the distance he had gone that he should be very tired, and he sat

down on the trunk of a fallen tree. His wound did not trouble him from his fast walking, but he felt weak. It seemed to him as though he had passed through a great moral struggle, from which he now emerged triumphant spiritually, but lacking his old confidence in his unyielding honour.

"Portia, Portia," he said aloud.

Until this moment he had never known what it was to look forward to death gratefully, but his strength in his own integrity was shaken. A curious dread of the future came upon him. Suppose he should have no strength to meet fresh temptations. He thought it must bring great peace to a person when death put an end to the perplexed struggle of life. He had recognised in time the insidious temptation the possibility of his father-in-law's election had brought; but suppose he should not see so clearly another time? He was a man of too simple and direct a nature to put strange and morbid thoughts at their true value. He failed to appreciate that they often resulted from depression, either physical or mental.

The sunshine was too warm and pleasant for him to be cold. Had he been in the least chilly he would have risen and walked, despite his weariness. His strong sense of duty would not allow him to neglect himself, although he was indifferent to his own well-being, and

felt now that no love of life flourished in him. But he had the soldier's instinct to hold himself in readiness to serve at a moment's notice. A subtle change had developed in him since he first went to the war. The worried lines that business anxieties had made in his face were gone; his kindly expression had given way to sternness; and he bore himself like a man who made a virtue of authority. This latter quality in him neither Portia nor her father understood. She was imperious in a feminine way, demanding personal homage. West could never learn to be subordinate to those above him, and would not receive a word of advice or criticism. But he expected absolute and unquestioning obedience from his official inferiors.

Matthews had the larger justice of the soldier in this respect, and if he exacted entire obedience from his men, he also respected, in equal measure, the authority of his superiors.

He had tried in vain to adjust his thought to his wife's way of living, to sympathise with her point of view. In no spirit of criticism toward her he was, nevertheless, obliged to admit to himself that they did not seem fitted to mutual happiness. He recalled wistfully his old dreams. He had never imagined marriage without children. They seemed to belong to the eternal fitness of things. There

was something melancholy to him in the thought that he had no little girl who would perpetuate Portia's beauty; no son to inherit his name and fortune and the traditions of his family.

Secretary West had never desired a son; he had no personal regard for the nephews he was educating, and it was not likely that the idea of grandchildren appealed to him. As for Mrs. Matthews, she felt that the tiny fluttering hands of a baby would push her a step further on in life, and that her own personality might fade in contrast to the aggressive strength of youth.

To these two great egoists, who loved the present because they took part in it, and shrank from the idea of a future which knew them not, Matthews's unuttered longing would have been incomprehensible.

When at last it dawned upon Mrs. Matthews that her husband had purposely disregarded her request, and had even left the house with no word of explanation, she was alarmed. It did not enter her mind that his anger would carry him to such extremes, and the nervous condition into which the Polonski affair had thrown her made her apprehensive of some fresh evil. She became confident that his always tender consideration made him shrink from telling her anything that might wound her. Then she recalled his rudeness

toward Countess Polonski the previous afternoon, and this seemed the solution of his strange manner. He, too, must have heard the scandal, and dreaded to tell her. Her relief was so great when she had settled upon this reason, that she felt a return of energy and good spirits. Luncheon had already been waiting an hour. She went down-stairs and read the paper while she waited for fresh tea to be made. She decided to write to Virginia and tell her all the news. No, she could not write to that child of such a shameful thing. She would merely tell her that Polonski had been recalled to Russia, and add the fact of La Cerf's death.

At four o'clock that afternoon she was surprised by a call from Senator Chadwick. He had written to her that he would not be home until the early part of the following week.

"You don't know how I have missed you," she cried, as she shook hands cordially with him. "There have been one hundred and one little things I have wanted to talk about to you. I think politics the most fascinating thing in the world. Do sit down and tell me all about your trip, and what brought you home sooner than you expected. Of course you want a cup of tea?"

"Of course," he answered, smiling with a passing thought of the last time he had had

tea in that very room when Countess Polonski had been present.

He was looking well and his apparent good spirits were infectious. "Have you observed my new hat?" he asked, lifting it from the chair beside him. "I had to buy it on my way out here. My former one was a sight. Offensive eggs do leave their mark, you know, even on the best of things, and that was a good silk hat of mine. An unfriendly stone broke the top. Fortunately my head didn't occupy the entire hat. I got things started pretty well back in Ohio, and I thought I'd better come home and not delay that other matter."

"I have already seen the proof," she told him.

He nodded. "Now tell me about Greenleaf. I want to get hold of him. If we can get him to go to Ohio and make a speech for your father at the convention, we'll be pretty sure to win out."

"I think we can," she answered, "for that matter I'm perfectly willing to go up to New York and see him myself. But tell me first about your trip. Did my father seem to be popular in the country districts?"

"Yes," he answered; "I wish I could have remained to make more speeches, but I have to be at the Senate to see about the passing of a bill I have been working for, and I had to

cut my time short. I enjoyed it. I love a campaign. The excitement of it gets into my blood. Don't I look well? And yet I have been through enough to tire out most anybody. When I entered a town I always made a speech to the crowd at the depot; then a committee hustled me off to a hotel for supper, put me on a lounge for a cat-nap afterward, and woke me in time to speak at the usual wigwam. I was generally despatched on the midnight train, if there happened to be a train at such an hour. But I loved it. Have you any idea what I mean when I say that the sound of my own voice intoxicates me and carries me on to say things that I hadn't even thought of before?"

Mrs. Matthews caught the light of excitement in his eyes. For the first time she found him personally interesting. After all, this conventional little man had a touch of genius. She had never heard him speak, but she began to understand why it was that he had been called "the silver-tongued."

"The instant I face my audience I can feel a thrill go over me. I get giddy, light-headed, if you will, but I know I am speaking well, that the excitement is making me sharp mentally, and I know I have the people with me. I'm inclined to be stiff in company —"

"Not stiff," she interrupted, her eyes twinkling, "only a little prim, Senator Chadwick.

And, really, I wouldn't let it worry me. Such primness seems the outward and visible sign of an inward grace. Now, you would never be suspected of laxness." Her mind still ran on Polonski and his dressing-gown.

"Thank you," he answered, a trifle puzzled. He suspected Mrs. Matthews of always trying to say epigrammatic things, and it did not seem worth while to him. His admiration for her was based solely on her social success and not on her mental accomplishments. "Well, anyway, I used to be worse than I am now. I didn't go with the kind of people I do now. This last week I visited the town where I was raised," shaking his head with an introspective look, "and, I tell you it was awful. Nice people, but plain, no ideas outside their local interests. I visited the dry-goods store where I used to clerk. I never was more depressed, nor so glad to get away from a place in all my life before. And I have to thank my voice for having gotten away. It happened like this. One of the girls got up a Shakespeare Club and I joined. Then I began to realise what it meant to feel words and phrases. I used to walk out toward the country of an evening so as to get away from people on the streets, and recite aloud the phrases that had fascinated me. And it was my own voice that seemed to be saying to me to go away and make a name for myself, so

that was how it was that I went to Cincinnati and studied law."

She had never liked him better than at this moment. He was so cheerful and plucky, possessing a childlike simplicity in spite of his political trickiness. He did not seem quite a gentleman; his dress was too exquisite, his manner too careful. But he had the finest speaking voice she had ever heard. The talk reverted once more to the political situation, and as he ran over some of his experiences in detail her confidence in her father's chances deepened. She was apt to be too easily convinced, having in common with the Secretary himself too great an optimism, too strong a conceit in personal success to regard the discouraging side.

Chadwick also failed to appreciate fully that he based his confidence on one-sided grounds, and he did not put a proper value on his audience. It was his political allies who came to hear him speak and inflated his judgment by their vigorous cheering. While speaking he never took seriously into account the fact that his rival, in another part of the town, was holding forth to an equally enthusiastic audience of the opposite party.

At last he rose to go. He put his empty teacup and saucer on the tray. "I am reminded of that snowy afternoon this winter when you made tea for Countess Polonski and

me. What has become of that pretty kitten?" He still retained the picture it made in the Russian's lap, purring because of the warmth of the fire and the gentle white hand that stroked it.

"I gave it away," she answered. Her expression impressed him as strange. For the time she had almost forgotten the Polonski affair. Chadwick could not know. He had only just come into the city. "Sit down again," she said.

He did so with the feeling that some disaster impended.

As briefly as she could she told him what had occurred.

He was silent some moments. She had never known a person could turn quite so white. At last he looked up.

"Mrs. Matthews," he said, in the tone of one making a simple statement, "I loved her."

He buried his face in his hands.

She stood looking at him. Suddenly she seized hold of his arm, and shook him.

"Don't," she cried; "if you love her go to her. She needs you."

Chapter XX

SECRETARY WEST was leaving his office the next day somewhat earlier in the afternoon than usual. Prentiss was to remain longer, however, to finish some correspondence.

"I may be home late to dinner," he said, looking up from his work. "I want to clear things away, and start fresh to-morrow."

It struck the Secretary that he looked pale. "You mustn't work too hard, David," he said, kindly. "It doesn't do to exhaust one's strength."

"Oh, I'm wiry," answered Prentiss, cheerfully. "I get tired out and I look as though I'd been dragged through a knot-hole, but I never get downright sick."

"Young men of spirit all talk alike in that way," West rejoined. "Well, it's a fine thing. I shall leave the carriage for you. I intend to walk home. I need some exercise, and it is a good stretch. You may overtake me. By the way, you might stop at the post-office for the last mail."

He made himself miserable reading unfa-

vourable articles about himself, and he grew passionately angry over an anonymous letter. Nothing had occurred that day to mar his serenity. He had not been interrupted by politicians or poor people wishing a clerkship in the department, and he had accomplished an immense amount of work. The air outside was sweet to his nostrils after the close atmosphere of the office, and he felt a pleasant anticipation of his walk home. The sky was clear, save for a cloud-bank in the west, and he judged there would be a fine sunset. Then he remembered that the ground was damp from recent rain, and being of careful habit, he went back, and put on the extra pair of goloshes he kept in his office closet.

"It isn't going to rain, is it?" inquired Prentiss.

"I think not," said the Secretary, "I think not. If Senator Chadwick looks in don't tell him which way I've gone. He has really become quite annoying lately. If he had his way I would not have any time for my duties whatever. I think I may be obliged to tell him sometime that it is not he, but Ohio, who will decide as to my endorsement. He means well, but he is rather presuming. I have often been astonished at Portia's great liking for him. She had such a fancy, too, for that Indian, who died lately. I never could help thinking he was a negro dressed up. Quite a curious creature."

As he went down the steps of the building, drawing on his gloves, he repeated the last phrase over to himself, "Quite a curious creature." He wondered if Shakespeare had in mind some such person when he wrote "Othello," and he tried to recall certain passages. As he thus walked on happily he became conscious of hurrying steps that paused when they came up with him. He turned and saw Mr. Haas, out of breath, and red in the face.

"I'm most fortunate," he said. "I was lucky enough to see you when you left the Treasury Building."

"If it is a business, and not a personal matter, I must ask you to come to see me to-morrow," West rejoined. "I'm on my way home. We are going to have a fine sunset. Have you observed how much longer the days are growing?"

"I will walk along with you," Haas volunteered. "It isn't a business matter, but it is very important. I must have a statement from you to-night for my paper."

"I won't give you any," said the Secretary, irritably, "I'll have nothing to do with managing newspapers."

"You will make a grave mistake if you never temporise," Haas replied, with some spirit and overheated by his run down the street. Much as he respected the Secretary

and believed in his efficiency, he was not inclined to allow him to treat him as an inferior or a mere newspaper man. They were both gentlemen, and Haas was superior in point of family. "You can't afford to dismiss the *Chronicle* in that way. Mr. Greenleaf has been especially kind to you, and —"

"Please confine yourself to facts, sir," West requested. "Mr. Greenleaf has not been kind to me. I am not indebted to him for any favour whatsoever. He considered me, so I was led to judge from his editorial, to be a strong candidate for the Presidency if I am nominated, and he has honoured my public character sufficiently to recommend me to the people. His attitude was not taken upon any basis of personal relation. Consequently I shall not depart from my usual custom of refusing to grant all newspaper interviews. I neither favour nor disfavour the *Chronicle* in this respect. I have been sufficiently misquoted in the papers to make me a martyr."

"Nonsense," retorted the other, heartily, "nonsense, my dear Secretary, you're no martyr. Every paper pokes fun at public men when it doesn't do worse. It's your American sense of humour. When I first came to this country I thought the condition of things alarming and that cut-throats and thieves held the best offices. After awhile I learned it didn't mean anything and that a paper

quieted down after the man it had opposed was elected, and seemed to regard him as a pretty good fellow."

"Then I have nothing to say save that our views are not the same," West answered.

Haas was perplexed. He was not so anxious to get an interview for the *Chronicle* as he was concerned for West's own sake in the matter that had arisen.

The two men walked on in silence. The Secretary was conscious of having had a companion forced upon him when he wished to be alone. To him the anxious correspondent was an unpleasant type. He resented his atmosphere of hurry and perpetual curiosity in the personal affairs of public men. Moreover, in the case of Haas he disapproved of him because he made his living in America and did not take out his citizenship papers. His own family had risen too quickly, and autocrat though he was personally, his ideals were too democratic for him to sympathise with the German's love of his ancestral home.

"You will have to make some statement," Haas repeated. "Will you write a signed letter for us?"

"I am always willing to write such a letter provided that it will appear exactly as I wrote it, with my name given in full, but I will not be interviewed and consequently misrepresented.

Is this matter an important one that you have in mind?"

"It is to you, sir. It isn't to me except as your friend," replied the German, with some indignation.

Secretary West caught the odour of flowers and turned to see a boy on the street corner they were turning. He beckoned to him. "I think I must take some pinks home to my niece. She is very fond of them. Dear me, I quite forgot the child was not at home. Well, I will take them to Mrs. Matthews."

The boy put his tray down on the sidewalk after West had made his selection and given him a dollar. He looked critically at his customer with the canny gaze of the street-gamin, then stooped and spun the coin on the brick sidewalk, bit it with his teeth, turned it over carefully in the palm of his hand, and finally handed it back with a knowing wink.

"Can't work that off on me, gov'nor. I'll take a greenback." Like many others, he was suspicious of silver money, and would accept only the paper money issued by the government, upon the proposal of West, as the wisest way of solving the financial problem.

Haas laughed. The situation was delicious.

West took back the dollar and passed the boy the preferred greenback. "Now, Mr.

Haas," he resumed, "what is the letter you wish me to write?" His pleasant humour had returned and he inhaled the odour of the carnations. "Much as I like these," he added, "they can't compare with the peculiar spicy fragrance of the clove-pinks my wife used to have in our garden." He sighed as he recalled that the little garden had bloomed but twice under her care.

Haas was regarding him in sheer amazement. Had the man no sense of humour; did he not see the absurdity of the situation, that he, the country's great financier, should be suspected by a street-vendor of trying to pass counterfeit money? But his face showed no trace of amusement, nor, indeed, had he been amused. The incident had not made the slightest impression upon him either of amusement or annoyance.

"The letter I want you to write," said Haas, with the resignation of despair at his inability to understand him, "is one of explanation in regard to the circular you have issued. I fear you did not consult your more conservative friends when you took the step, and I am afraid it will turn out to have been a mistake. I speak frankly, for I am sorry and much concerned. It's so unlike your usual attitude, and I foresee that the public will demand an explanation. For that matter, Greenleaf has already run across a copy of it in New York

and telegraphed me to obtain an interview with you at once."

"Circular," repeated West, "I know of no circular."

"You don't know of this circular!" cried Haas. "Why, you must."

The Secretary was silent, haughtily bent on not repeating his denial.

His companion continued excitedly: "If they've issued it without consulting you they've played a low trick. It's a ridiculous affair. And you don't mean to tell me you haven't even seen it."

"I've seen nothing," he answered, his heart quailing. He felt that he was about to be struck a blow in the dark.

The street was crowded with people. The women invariably glanced with admiration at the handsome Secretary, whose short-sightedness prevented him from recognising his friends. Several men had given him a look of peculiar sharpness. He had seen none of this. The actual people, pushing, jostling, good-natured, never existed for him save on paper. He passed through unconscious as to whether the last person going by were a man or a woman.

But the alert correspondent had noticed the sharp glances. "I think we'd better turn down this side street," he suggested.

The Secretary nodded. "I hope it's noth-

ing unpleasant," he said, when they had gone a little way; "I hope it's nothing unpleasant, Mr. Haas."

"I'm afraid it is," was the brief reply.

The other sighed. "Something disheartening is always cropping up. Have you a copy of this paper with you? I suppose it is some campaign letter."

Haas drew a folded paper from his waistcoat pocket, opened it, and passed it to the Secretary.

He saw at the top of two columns of print the italicised words, "For Private Circulation Only."

"It's been in the hands of every newspaper man and politician in Washington for at least two days, but it didn't find its way into print. I didn't think of seeing you about it until Greenleaf telegraphed," explained Haas.

West stood still to read the circular. When he had finished he tore it into strips and tossed them away.

"I have been made a fool of," he said, bitterly.

Haas could have told him much, but he said nothing. He had warned him from the first not to trust too much to Chadwick and to his set. In this circular they had interpreted their leader in the worst manner and put him in a false position, from which he could not extricate himself.

"You can understand now what sort of a letter we want for the *Chronicle*. We want an explanation of the change you had made from your usual conservative attitude; but as it turns out that you didn't have anything to do with this, I think the best thing will be a denial on your part. If you do this you'll have to go back in a way on your own friends, for they've gotten this up; but—I speak unreservedly, Mr. West—Chadwick and his gang are so low, they wouldn't mind a kick in the face if it straightened out their idiocy and put you right with the public again. I know them."

The Secretary's face was adamant. "You have been very kind and loyal, Mr. Haas, and I shall never be able to tell you how much I appreciate your directness with me at a time when other friends seem to have played me false. I shall not act in this matter, however, until I have accorded them the justice of hearing their reasons for this unprecedented proceeding."

Haas left him in despair at the next corner. He did not know what to do. Then he remembered that Prentiss might still be at the office. As he hastened to the Treasury Building his active mind outlined an article for the next morning's *Chronicle*. He would say that West himself could not be found, but his private secretary had expressed his amazement at the circular, his belief that Mr. West knew

nothing of the matter and that his friends had acted without consulting him.

"I have it," he said, exultantly; "I'll save him in spite of himself."

He burst into the private office where Prentiss was sitting without the ceremony of knocking. "Get on your hat and come out with me. I want to see you on business, and I'm also perishing for a glass of beer. We'll go over to Casey's across the street."

Prentiss put his work away, rose, and changed his office coat for his street attire and put on his hat. "Wait till I get my cane in the next room and lock up things. How jolly you look, Haas," he added, with his quick smile. "I'm tired out. How do you think things are looking for Mr. West?"

Haas patted him on the back. "Don't you worry about him, my dear boy. He's coming through all right. A glass of beer will brighten you up." He had heard that the engagement between him and Virginia was broken. He strolled out into the corridor humming sympathetically:

“‘Ich weiss nicht was soll es bedeuten,
Dass ich so traurig bin.’”

The Secretary walked on with a sense of suffocation. He strove to regain a spiritual calmness that would enable him to view the matter justly, but stinging and irritating

thoughts kept returning until he felt as if he were fighting off a swarm of angry bees that darkened the air about him.

As he recalled the insulting allusions to the President contained in the article, he felt how his honour had been outraged, and he framed mentally a haughty reply which should deny any previous knowledge of the publication.

He left the city limits and turned into the country road. He remembered that he had wished to enjoy the sunset, but he could not bring himself to renounce his anger. His passions mastered him and he rejoiced in their mastery. But long habit of moral suasion was stronger. When a boy he had learned to control himself by gazing upon the immensity of the heavens, until sheer humility at the thought of his pitiful rage had quieted him.

At last, when he had gone some distance he paused, and, leaning against the rustic fence that skirted the roadway, he looked across the field to the sunset. The sky was pale gold, and was reflected on the wet meadow-lands with its pools of water, long stretches of brown stubble, and occasional patches of emerald green where the snow had lain deepest. The feel of spring was already in the air. The herd of cows at the farther end of the pasture, seeing his figure near the bars, came forward lowing, for it was near their milking hour. The odour of milk, their mild eyes, their deep audible

breathing as they crowded against the fence, all seemed a part of the sweet air, the group of familiar trees, the glory of the sky beyond.

So he stood, and peace reëntered his heart.

Two figures came into the landscape and made their way across the field. They were those of a tall man and a small boy in drummer's uniform. The two came diagonally across the field to where West stood. His face flushed. He was tempted to move on, but his pride constrained him to stand still.

The man's black garments hung as loosely on him as on a scarecrow. His hat was a black derby, and about his shoulders he had closely wrapped a small fringed shawl. Yet there was no lack of dignity in that awkward, ungainly figure. Strength was stamped upon it, and the pathetic nobility of toil. His long legs carried him ahead so rapidly that the little fellow at his side had to run now and then to keep up with him.

The President, when he looked up and realised toward whom he was heading, experienced also a momentary embarrassment.

"Good afternoon, Mr. West," he called when within speaking distance. "Are you going to start the cows home? I see you always have to be driving something."

"No," said the Secretary, gravely; "they don't belong to me."

The President took off his derby and waved

it at the cows. They put down their heads and shied off blunderingly. He took advantage of their moving aside to slip the bars, and let himself through into the road.

The boy had already climbed over the fence, careful as he did so not to press too hard a little creature he held under one arm.

"Show Mr. West your kitten, Tad," said his father.

The child displayed a tiny bedraggled cat, with an old red ribbon tied around its neck. "Hurry up and give me your jack-knife, father. I've got to cut this string off right away. It's so long she steps on it when she tries to walk."

He sat down on the stump of a tree with the kitten hugged between his knees, and put up his hand for the knife.

The President winked at West, and thrust his hand into the pocket of his black pantaloons. "All right, Tad. I always oblige the soldiers. Nothing too good for them."

The boy laughed delightedly. No new recruit was ever prouder of his uniform than he. "I'll open it," he interposed, as his father started to draw up the dullest blade.

"Be careful not to cut the kitten," said the President as he handed it to him.

"Don't you be afraid," retorted Tad, breaking off his thumb-nail in his effort to open the heavy knife.

The Secretary had no fondness for kittens, and he thought the present one quite unattractive. For some reason he had a passing thought of Virginia, and was puzzled. Then he realised that the kitten had reminded him of her fondness for one she used to have. The red ribbon, too, had a vague association with it.

"The country is so fresh after the rain," he remarked. "Do you notice those green patches? I walked home to-night for the sunset and open air."

The President leaned his back against the fence. He nodded sympathetically. "Tad and I ran away. We've been out to the Soldiers' Home, and I let him lead me by a short cut he discovered last summer when my family was spending the hot weather out there. But I guess we've got ourselves pretty well covered with mud."

Both men were acutely conscious of their mutual antagonism, which, however, seemed to lessen as they stood alone beneath the glowing sky.

West felt his humiliation over the circular return, and twice he tried to speak in explanation of the insulting allusions to his companion which it had contained, but pride restrained him. He decided to wait until evening and then write a letter.

No member of his Cabinet had tormented

and embarrassed the President more than his Secretary of the Treasury, and no one, he knew, had criticised him more severely and more openly stated his grievances. But he had the insight to know that this irritable attitude toward him was not dictated by malice, although there was much jealousy of his success and resentment at his policy. West was the one man with whom he could not get on; his wit, his patience, his kindness, none of these qualities could find the open sesame to that eminently able, haughty, and unfathomable nature.

"West and I rub each other the wrong way," he used to say. "He's always trying conscientiously to let me know how much he disapproves of me for fear I might be deceived."

But this afternoon they both felt more kindly toward each other than ever before. And this suggestion of sympathy came from their being in the tranquil open landscape together, and the consciousness that, in spite of their disagreements, they, with other brave men, had together come through the terrible struggle of the last four years. For this little while the prospect of their rival candidacy seemed unimportant.

"I shouldn't mind going to a husking-bee or spelling-school to-night," remarked the President, breaking off a splinter of the fence

with his nervous gaunt hand. "I want some fun. I reckon I'll have to go to the theatre."

"I have never cared much for the theatre myself," answered West, "though I am fond of reading Shakespeare and especially the tragedies of Sophocles. My daughter tells me I don't read them from the dramatic standpoint. I think my natural inclination for pleasure was killed in me when young by my uncle. He was a scholar, a severe man of worldly means and position, and I was a poor dependent. I remember that when he entertained notable people he would not permit me to sit and talk with his guests as though I were an equal in aspirations if not in accomplishment, but I had to put on the habiliments of a servant and wait on the table." His voice vibrated with intense bitterness.

His companion smiled. "Well, I'm sure you're just as proud as if you hadn't had to wait on the table when there was company. I hope you got filled up after, though."

"He was not mean at the table; I must say that for him," West replied, seriously, with his never-failing regard for justice. He pointed to the sunset which he had been watching during the conversation.

The President half-turned. As the smile the anecdote had caused faded from his face he looked sadder than ever, with a weariness that

seemed no bodily fatigue merely, but to come from within outward.

The Secretary's countenance, though pale, conveyed no idea of physical weariness. There was a calm, a remoteness from the anxieties of the every-day world, in his expression; his fine gray eyes held a look of exaltation. He had won a terrific battle with his own passions that afternoon, and an almost religious peace had descended upon him.

He had no understanding of the worn black figure beside him, the weariness of that physical body which had worked so desperately hard that it had never known what it was to be anything but gaunt and knotted and awkward; nor any comprehension of the heart so tender that the woes of others daily crucified it.

“ — trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God who is our home.”

The Secretary repeated mentally the lines from his favourite poet, but his reserve was too deep for him to say them aloud.

His companion had turned again from the clear, wonderful brightness of the western sky, and his gloomy eyes watched sadly the more evanescent and tender colouring in the east. The dimming woodlands, the grayer tones shadowing the approach of night appealed to the mysterious melancholy of his nature.

He had not the same sense of sublimity in poetry that West had. He preferred simple poems, annals of the heart, sad verses that sung his own sadness, or humourous doggerel that invoked his laughter.

West obeyed a sudden impulse to tell him then of the circular, and his own mortification and regret.

"It was sent to me yesterday," the President answered him, "but I did not read it. I quite understand how you feel about it." He knew West to be a mere toy in the hands of political charlatans. Yet he was beginning to fear a rival in him, and to wonder if he would be able to draw the disaffected elements of the Republican party to centre on him as their candidate. No trace of this anxiety showed in his face.

"Come on, Tad," he said, "we must be going." He extended his hand to his Secretary. "You mustn't take these politicians too seriously. I'll tell you a secret. I believe half of what I see them do, and nothing of what they say. And if it turns out that I'm the man the people choose it won't be because I'm the best man, but because they will have come to the conclusion that it isn't wise to swap horses when crossing the stream. Get up, Tad."

The child was whittling. "I don't want to go now. I'm not going. You can go on."

West looked down on him with annoyance written on his handsome face. He was fond of children, but he could not brook disobedience in them.

"I reckon Tad will come along pretty soon," said his father; "he knows mother will be worrying."

The little fellow seated on the stump between the two men whittled obstinately. The kitten, restored to respectability at having found a master, had retired to the middle of the road some feet away and was making her toilet with her small pink tongue.

"What are you making?" inquired the President.

"Boat," cried the child, naughtily.

The President waited patiently. He had the look that a tired mother might have worn. Much dealing with the humours of older children had mellowed him.

Suddenly little Tad flung the knife and wood aside, and with a passionate sob of contrition rushed to his father.

The President drew out his handkerchief, stooped and wiped the tears from the boy's face.

"He's taken too long a walk, I reckon," he said to West, his face illumined by his wonderful smile. He went and picked the jack-knife out of the mud, wiped it on a clump of dry grass, and returned it to his pocket. Then

he lifted the kitten in his large, homely, gentle hands and put it into his son's arms.

"Come on, Tad," he said, giving a pleasant farewell nod to his Secretary. "Mother'll be worrying."

They went down the road together, the President swinging his heavy walking-stick, the little soldier at his side trudging manfully along with the contented kitten hugged to his breast. The sun had set; the afterglow was bright in the sky, but by the time the two reached home it was dark.

Chapter XXI

PRENTISS came in late to dinner. He looked both tired and irritable.

"I don't want anything to eat. I'll take some wine, though." He removed his eyeglasses and began polishing them nervously.

"Let me give you a saucer of this floating-island," said Mrs. Matthews, who was serving the dessert. "And I think you'd better have a slice of bread. Jim, bring Mr. Prentiss the bread. What is the matter with you all? No one seems to be hungry. Father was so foolish as to walk home, and is so tired he hasn't any appetite left."

"I'm sorry I didn't overtake you, sir," said Prentiss. "I left town too late. Did you enjoy your walk?"

"Not particularly," answered the Secretary.

General Matthews, having finished his meal, lighted a cigar. "I hear that Polonski is still in New York waiting his passports. Did you know there's to be an auction of the odds and ends they left? I might pick you up a souvenir, Portia."

"I don't care for it, thank you," she answered. For some days she had been con-

scious of an indefinable change in his manner toward her. He treated her coldly, and at times she had even felt he regarded her with aversion. At first she was puzzled, and, thinking there must be some misunderstanding, she had endeavoured to bring about an explanation. But he affected not to see her effort, and this filled her with resentment. For the first time she had a feeling of pride toward him, and there were moments when he inspired her with dislike, and she wished, with no conscience-stricken reproaches the second time, that he would return to his brigade. If her father were not nominated she would go to Europe for a year. It was not well for married people to see too much of each other.

"It has always surprised me," he continued, "that the affair was hushed up so quickly. With the exception of one or two disreputable sheets the papers have been pretty decent. They intimate that he kept private gambling-rooms in his house, and all they say about her is that she was up to her dimpled elbows in some diplomatic pie."

"I hope they didn't say dimpled elbows," interposed his wife, scornfully.

"Why, weren't they dimpled?" inquired Prentiss. "I think I will take a little more of that custard. I'm hungrier than I thought."

"I was proud of the attitude of the press in the matter," Matthews remarked, flicking the

ashes off his cigar. "It shows the innate chivalry of the American who doesn't want to make a sensation out of a poor woman's shame. I had a hint of the sorry business some days before it was officially known. That's why I spoke to you as I did that afternoon." It was the first time he had referred to the incident.

"I remember you insulted her in my presence," Portia retorted, "and never apologised."

Matthews laughed. "Did I?" he said.

"Of course this is just among us," said Prentiss, "but who do you suppose has been lending Polonski money since he got into this scrape? Greenleaf."

"I don't believe it," cried Mrs. Matthews. "Who told you?"

"Haas himself. He ought to know. He wanted a loan himself, and Greenleaf told him confidentially that he couldn't let him have it, as he had lent so much to the Russian."

"Don't you remember, Tom," said Mrs. Matthews, forgetting their coldness, "how he just kept hold of Greenleaf that night at supper after the theatre? I hope he didn't get any money out of you."

"What did you say about Mr. Haas, David?" asked the Secretary, showing his first interest in the conversation. "Have you seen him to-day?"

"I have just come from him," he answered. After a moment's hesitation he added, "He

told me that he had seen you on your way home."

The Secretary addressed his daughter. "I have suffered a terrible humiliation, and it has decided me to withdraw my name."

She paled.

"What has happened?" asked Matthews.

"Much," answered his father-in-law, bitterly. "I am the victim of my friends. No enemy could have contrived a more effectual blow for my destruction." He felt in his waistcoat pocket. "No, I had forgotten. I destroyed the copy I had. It was one Mr. Haas gave me. He alone of my friends seems to have been loyal to me."

"Won't you please tell me what has happened?" begged Mrs. Matthews. "You may leave the room, Jim," she added to the servant.

"I have it," put in Prentiss, drawing out a folded circular. "Haas came to see me after he had left you and we went off together to find Chadwick, but he's gone to New York."

"Let me see it," demanded Mrs. Matthews, putting out her hand eagerly. "Is it about father?" Her eyes were bright with excitement and the colour after the first startled moment had come back into her face.

"No, let me read it aloud," said Prentiss.

"Read it, David," commanded West. "I should like to hear how it sounds." He folded

his arms on his breast, his face composed and cold.

"Don't, father," said Portia, with a curious, nervous, little laugh; "you look like a judge!"

"Look at this," cried Prentiss, holding the paper away from him and pointing at it scornfully, "'For Private Circulation Only.' That was the first thing that damned fool started in with."

"Perhaps he did it to call greater attention to the article," suggested Mrs. Matthews. "It might arouse curiosity."

He gave her a quick look. "So you think it's Chadwick, too? I didn't think you'd admit it. Have you any idea of his motive? I can't see any sense to it. Just wait till I finish it."

"For whatever motive it may have been done," said the Secretary, "it was foolish and prejudicial to the cause. My actions in public life have always been open to inspection. That word 'private' is fatal to a public servant such as I am."

"Still I think one may take such an article too seriously," said General Matthews, "and overestimate the harm it does. When a man's character has impressed itself well upon the people at large his reputation is not to be injured by a foolish article. We know ourselves how little we're disposed to believe seriously half of what we hear about our

friends. We take things with a grain of salt."

"Read it, David," said Mrs. Matthews, impatiently. She resented her husband taking any part in the discussion. He had shown no interest in her father's campaign; it was not for him to speak.

Prentiss had been glancing down the printed page. Now he read a paragraph with scornful emphasis:

"Those statesmen, no low tricksters and politicians, but loftiest patriots who would shed their blood for their country, who conscientiously believe that the interests of the nation and the mighty cause of freedom demand a change in favour of vigour and purity, have no choice but to appeal to the people before it is too late. They believe in the uncorrupted hearts of the people; to these hearts they appeal for a fair discussion of principles, that this fratricidal war shall not languish longer.

"Those in behalf of whom this appeal is made have thoughtfully surveyed the political field and have arrived at the following conclusions: First—'

"Now just let me ask you right here," Prentiss interrupted himself, "if that doesn't sound like a schoolboy oration or an hysterical girl-graduate? That's what I always said about Chadwick. He has a wonderful gift of oratory and when he speaks you get the flow of words;

he's magnetic as a speaker, he knows his audience by instinct and he can manage men, but that's all. He has no real intellectual attainments. If you read a speech of his in cold print it's mere balderdash. He doesn't dare stand on anything but the impression his personality makes. That's why he's so nervous. He doesn't dare let people lose the echo of his splendid voice and he's always popping up on public occasions. I tell you, Mr. West, you ought to have read his speeches." The young man's sensitive face showed how much he was affected by the foolish political blunder that had victimised his patron.

"You are scolding like a woman, David," interrupted Mrs. Matthews, impatiently, "and you are needlessly prejudicing father against Senator Chadwick. Please give me the circular and I will read it."

"No, my dear," interposed her father, calmly, "he doesn't prejudice me, but I am reminded of a good story —"

She tapped impatiently on the floor with her foot. "My dear father, you are so seldom reminded of a good story that I think you might postpone it as a special treat for some time when we are not all upset."

"Why don't you pass Portia that paper when she wants it, Prentiss?" asked General Matthews, angrily. He saw that his wife was much disturbed.

“As the story relates to the case in hand I think I will tell it now,” resumed the Secretary, “for it may point out how blind we have all been in regard to this Chadwick. One of my friends, who is in charge of a home for deaf and dumb children, invited a famous orator to speak to the children. My friend proposed to stand beside him while he talked and translate his speech into the sign-language. You may happen to know that one or two gestures will stand for a phrase and that they try to express an idea rather than the mere words by a motion. Well, my friend discovered that he was repeating the same idea over and over to the children, who were beginning to be puzzled. Meanwhile the people who could hear were much impressed by the eloquent flow of words, and kept applauding; but my friend was making up a sermon of his own and giving it to the children, not paying the least attention to what the speaker of the afternoon was saying. Since I have seen that circular I have entirely altered my opinion of Senator Chadwick. Continue it, David, for I want Portia and Mr. Matthews to hear it!” He listened with composure to those conclusions drawn to show his own suitability for the great office, but when the long and violent arraignment of the President was made, he flushed with mortification. However earnestly he tried to appreciate the qualities of his

chief, he had never honestly admired him, and although he had written the most carping criticisms of him to friends he had always considered that he gave a private opinion. He had no idea how widely he had circulated his unfavourable opinion, nor did he realise his chief motive for this dislike. It lay in the fact that the President from the beginning had not considered himself merely "chief among his equals" when consulting with his Cabinet, but directed them and kept his own counsel until he saw fit to act.

He broke into the reading. "I have seen the President already, and stated to him my deep regret at these expressions with which I had nothing to do, but which, of course, will be put upon my shoulders. It makes me hate public life when I realise how ineffectual are the most faithful labours and upright conduct to protect any man against malignant lies. I have to shoulder the mistakes of one set of friends, and, in addition, bear the reproaches of other friends for those very mistakes for which I am not responsible. I have grown to hate public life and, God willing, I shall retire from it as soon as my present duties are ended."

"Listen to this," cried Prentiss. "'Seventh, that we find united in the Honourable Phineas West more of the qualities needed in a President during the next four years than are com-

bined in any other available candidate. His record is unimpeachable, showing him to be a statesman of rare ability, while his splendid private character furnishes the surest available guarantee of economy and purity in the management of public affairs.'” He flung the circular on the table and laughed. “How’s that for a ‘character’? You could get a position on that if you were without one, Mr. West!”

Mrs. Matthews looked at him in absolute amazement. What was the matter with him these days? It was unlike him to show such bitter mirth. Where was his old kindly tact? Had his loss of Virginia destroyed his power of sympathy?

“I do not see why you need sneer at that,” she said. “Nothing could be truer of father. He deserves all that praise and more.” Her voice quivered.

Prentiss was touched and ashamed. “I didn’t mean it in that way. Nothing could be truer. But don’t you see the cheapness of the thing, the vulgarity? It isn’t as if the same article had appeared in a reputable paper, but it is issued anonymously right here in Washington, where your father can’t help but be suspected of having a hand in it, especially in the attack on the President. It doesn’t look very well, an anonymous attack from a member of the Cabinet! But the most humiliat-

ing thing is that it isn't taken seriously. Haas told me every newspaper man in town saw it two days ago, and laughed at it and tossed it aside, not even thinking it worth while to give it space in his paper."

Secretary West folded his napkin, and drew it through the ring. "I shall trace this matter to the root, and find out who is responsible."

"You will not have to go far, father," Mrs. Matthews said, in a curiously even voice. "I suggested the article, and wrote the greater part of it myself. Senator Chadwick, however, assisted me and saw to the printing and business part of it."

He stared at her. As his mind grasped the significance of her words his terrible anger of the afternoon revived. He checked the words that rose to his lips, striving to remember that she was his daughter as well as his persecutor.

She met his glance steadily. His anger had never before been directed toward her. She put her hand to her side.

He sat silent with heaving breast. The passion in his face gradually gave way to coldness. The look of the great lawgiver that he afterward became seemed to turn his white face to marble in which the eyes shone with a steady light. There was something fearful in the expression of those fine eyes, as if his judgment had passed beyond the point when it could be affected by the thought of their

relationship. In that moment she appreciated him as she never had before, and in that moment of supreme finding lost him. She knew he would never forgive her.

Prentiss laughed. The shock of her confession, the way in which the two now faced each other, roused in him a ghastly sense of the ridiculous.

"A Portia come to judgment!" he cried. The strain had been almost more than he could endure. But as soon as the worse than tactless words left his lips he realised his mistake, and became cool. He rose to leave the room.

His action prompted Matthews to rise also. He looked almost sick. His presence could accomplish nothing. Perhaps alone with his daughter Mr. West would relapse into tenderness. He followed Prentiss across into the hall. Neither spoke to the other. Matthews put on his hat, and left the house. He felt that he should suffocate if he did not get the fresh air.

Secretary West saw them go. He realised that he was alone with his daughter. A look of peculiar dislike crossed his face. He rose hurriedly, and followed the other two men.

She watched the door close after him. Once, twice, three times she started to rise, then finally sank back into her chair.

The butler, opening the door to clear away

the dessert things, drew back in terror at seeing his mistress, her beautiful head bowed on her arms on the table, weeping. He had the sympathy of his race. He tiptoed away. Soon the news had spread to every servant. Speculation ran rife. Mrs. Matthews's maid stole to the door, and listened to the smothered sobbing. Then she, too, drew away frightened. Disaster had befallen the household. Some one spoke the name of Miss Virginia. The more emotional began to weep and wail. They all worshipped her.

Secretary West, dictating a letter to Prentiss in the library, was annoyed by a timid knock on the door.

In answer to his irritated invitation to enter, Tobias, the indulged old coachman, came in.

"Ef yo please, Massa Phineas," he said, deprecatingly, "them ignerant black niggahs out in de kitchen will have it that Miss V'ginia be ailing, or mos' likely, dead."

"Nonsense," answered the Secretary, frowning, "don't interrupt me again. Go out and shut that door. Miss Virginia is as well as she ever was. I had a letter from her yesterday."

Chapter XXII

SECRETARY WEST revoked his first impulsive decision to withdraw his name. A committee waited upon him the next afternoon, and persuaded him that it was not the part of wisdom to regard too seriously an imprudent, although well-intentioned, campaign document.

Senator Chadwick was telegraphed for, and returned at once from New York. He went directly to the Treasury Building when he arrived, but found that the Secretary was attending a Cabinet meeting. So he waited for him in the private office with Prentiss.

The latter felt a subtle change in him. He seemed to have acquired an unconscious dignity; he had a peculiar brightness of expression, as one who possessed a secret happiness; he showed no anxiety in regard to the unfortunate circular. He renewed his offer to publish a volume of poems for Prentiss.

"No, no," said Prentiss, laughing. "I'll find a publisher in time. Would you like to look at the paper?"

"In a moment," answered Chadwick.

"Don't let me interrupt you. Can I have a sheet of paper and a pen? Don't move. I'll just clear myself a place on the corner of this table."

For some time there was silence. Suddenly Chadwick crumpled the paper he was writing into a ball, and flung it into the waste-paper basket.

"I am going to ask you if you will take a message to Mrs. Matthews from me? I find it difficult to write to her. Expression in writing does not come easily to me."

"Certainly," Prentiss replied, in some astonishment. "What is it?"

Chadwick fixed his bright eyes on him. "I should like to have you tell her," he said, slowly, "that I was married to Catherine Bazarov three days ago in the Russian Church in New York."

"Who!" exclaimed Prentiss.

Chadwick saw that he had not understood. He hesitated. He could not bring himself to utter the hated name of Polonski.

The young man was puzzled by his embarrassment and hesitation. Then light broke upon his bewilderment. "Oh, I see," he said. He felt an insane desire to laugh, and then had the grace to be ashamed. "I hope you will be happy," he added.

The other continued as if he had not heard the remark. "We were married privately,

and I hope we may avoid newspaper publicity." He took up a magazine and opened it.

Prentiss felt the subject to be dismissed. He continued his work mechanically. What a marriage, what a marriage! his mind repeated with wonder. He took a glance at the face of the man near him, so youthful when seen at a little distance, so filled with lines of dissimulation on a nearer view.

Chadwick's cleverness seemed to have failed him in this case. The Russian had probably seen her opportunity and taken it. He wondered if she had written for him to come to her. She would now no longer be the slave of Polonski, but an American wife. Had she gathered a hint of the independence of the latter position from Portia? The change must have seemed to her like coming out of a Siberian prison. But how would either she or her husband be able to endure the other? Then he reflected that there must be some psychological justification in their marriage, as both of them were so experienced and clever.

He thought of Virginia, so untouched by the world; Virginia, sweet as an opening rose; Virginia, with her innocent face and shining eyes. How often had he dreamed of her in her bridal white, his beloved, his little girl!

Chadwick was making a pretence of reading the paper. He was really thinking of his wife, whom he had left in quiet lodgings in New

York. The memory of her extreme gentleness, her sadness, her dependence on him, her gratitude, brought the tears to his eyes.

He was absorbed in this late but first real romance of his life, and he realised that he had acquired a new maturity and wider sympathy with other men. He saw no fault in her. His own cold and correct nature acknowledged the mysterious attraction of her richer if more faulty personality. It was a subtle and delicate loyalty to his wife that made him avoid meeting Mrs. Matthews. They could not see each other without consciousness of her terrible mistake, and he felt under the necessity of protecting his wife even from the judgment of the friend who had sent him to her.

Secretary West, when he finally arrived, met him with a coldness and restraint that did not lift during the entire interview. It ended unsatisfactorily, and Chadwick felt that the Secretary's confidence was closed to him for good. As he rose to go he asked to see the circular which he had not seen since it was printed. He explained that the printer had misunderstood his directions, and had issued it before he, Chadwick, had entirely completed his plans, and while he was absent from the city. There was none on the desk, and West stepped into the next room to ask Prentiss where he had put them.

While he was gone Chadwick hastily glanced

over a paper on the desk the other had unlocked when he entered the room.

The great Secretary had handled hundreds of millions of dollars without any part of it sticking to his fingers. His momentary absence now gave the first and only opportunity to one of his friends, political or otherwise, to gain a hint for private speculation during his administration.

Chadwick had not scrupled to take advantage of West's absence, but he was not without gratitude for this surreptitious information, and he did his best to make amends for the onus of ridicule the unfortunate publication had brought upon his party's candidate. He made a sensation the following day by rising in the Senate and taking upon himself the authorship of the now famous circular. He added that some person whom he did not know had appended to it the endorsement, "For private circulation only," in order, so he thought, to give it a greater vogue. He publicly congratulated himself that he was chairman of a respectable association with branches all over the country, "whose object was to secure the election of an efficient and radical candidate for the Presidency in opposition to the time-serving policy of the day."

His endeavour, in spite of his splendid talent for public speaking, failed to make the secret circular convincing.

The Ohio State convention was to meet in ten days, and West, with ill-concealed anxiety, awaited the decision of his State.

His attitude toward his daughter remained unchanged. This continued coldness on his part made it impossible for her to approach him in any spirit of contrition, and the suppression of all emotion intensified their mutual bitter pride.

At last the day of the convention came. He had gone to his office as usual in the morning, but yielded to Prentiss's urgent advice to return home at noon and rest. The suspense and excitement were telling upon his nervous force, and he opened fearfully the arriving telegrams.

He wished to be away from them, and he relied upon his young secretary to send him at once any definite news. The quiet library at home opened like a haven of rest to his mental vision as he drove away from the city.

Portia met him at the door. "I saw you coming from my window. You are not ill?"

He shook his head. "No, but I had some work I could do at home as well as at the office. I sha'n't care for much lunch. I wish you would just send it in to me." He hung up his hat and coat, then went into the library and closed the door after him.

She took him in his lunch herself, and, having placed it on the table, sat down to talk with him while he ate.

"I made a little beef broth for you, father. I beat an egg into it, as it makes it so much more nourishing."

"Thank you," he answered, "it is very nice."

At last with an effort she inquired how the convention stood at last hearing.

"The reports are confusing and give me no satisfaction," he replied. "David will send word to me the instant anything definite is known."

"I have found it difficult to express to you my regret in the matter of the secret circular," she said. "I do not wish to reproach you, father dear, when I am the person to blame, but I feel you have been singularly hard and unforgiving to me. Not that I ask you to forgive me," she hastened to add; "that would be ridiculous and sentimental, as I meant the matter to your advantage. I admit frankly my mistake. You can't possibly feel any more distressed over it than I do. But, had the venture turned out to be successful, no one would have been more delighted than you. At least I think you might be just enough to admit that."

"You mistake me, Portia," he answered, "if you think my judgment in the matter is to be so moved. Whether the circular proved to be successful or not, the facts are unchanged. It was anonymous, which I should always

condemn; it insulted the President, which is unpardonable; and the whole tone was indescribably vulgar."

There was a silence of several moments.

Then he continued: "I had intended never to refer to the subject; but, since you have opened the discussion of your own accord, I must tell you that I was never more astonished. It is something your mother would not have thought of doing. It grieved me."

Her mother's gentle wraith thus summoned into the conversation brought to mind the faded daguerreotype her father cherished. She recalled the pretty timid face so like Virginia's.

"No," she retorted, with unmistakable emphasis, "I don't think she would have thought of doing it. She probably was very sweet, but her being my mother doesn't alter the fact that she doesn't look as if she had been overburdened with brains."

He regarded her with horror. Was this his daughter speaking so of the mother that had died when she was born?

Portia had already repented of the bitter, jealous words as she perceived they had only served to widen the breach between her father and herself.

"I have nothing more to say to you," he said. "Go to your husband. My son-in-law has never been congenial to me, but I respect him for his honesty and common sense. I

have no doubt that, had you advised with him in regard to the circular, that foolish mistake never would have been made."

She answered him with indignation. "If I had followed my husband's advice I should have opposed you."

He made no reply, but pushed aside the luncheon dishes and began to get out the materials for writing. His lips were white with emotion.

"Is this all you have to say to me?" she cried.

He wrote in silence some moments. Then he laid down his pen and looked up at her. "You are making me miserable. I dislike quarrelling and bickering, and this undignified reference to a painful subject. I wish you would write to Virginia to come home, that is, if it would not cut the child's visit short. Don't urge her if she is enjoying herself. But I miss her. And I think we need her to keep us sweet here in this household. I shall also speak to David to see that he doesn't torment her. She's too much of a child to enjoy having any one make love to her." He made an effort at kindness. "You should go for a walk this lovely day, Portia. You are not looking as well as usual."

"Thank you, I will go in a minute," she answered.

Leaning back in the cushioned chair, she

watched her father as he bent over his writing. He wanted Virginia while she was there, Virginia, who looked upon him as her indulgent, middle-aged uncle, the source of endless gifts and sweetmeats. She knew well enough that had she done this very thing she would have cried and kissed and coaxed the Secretary into forgiveness. The picture her imagination drew sickened her. Not for anything would she send for Virginia to come home. For the first time she was dissatisfied with her father. He was petty in his judgment of her. She knew wherein his real resentment lay; she had presumed to meddle in his affairs. He persisted in judging her from an irritating, masculine point of view as unwomanly. She saw now that he disliked her intellectual attainments; that he did not crave her appreciation of his best qualities.

"I do not fit in with his old-fashioned ideas," ran her bitter thought. "He prefers Virginia to make him worsted slippers, though I would spare nothing to make him President." This unworldly attitude in him toward women had formerly wakened her indulgence, even her approval, for it made him possible to manage in warding off a second marriage. Now, however, it wakened her contempt. His stately words had not in the least convinced her, and she still believed that he would have been delighted had the circular

proved a success, and so furthered his tremendous ambition.

The Secretary had tried in vain to concentrate his attention upon his work. He was all too conscious of his daughter's disapproving gaze, and annoyed with her almost beyond endurance. Would she never go? He wished to be alone.

She wished she had not destroyed the paper he had written Christmas afternoon on the political future of the negro. In all her life she had never done anything that had hurt her self-respect quite as much. It stuck in her memory like an ugly thing, and she could not rid herself of it unless she told him. But what right had she to burden him further with her own wrong-doing? He was so happily innocent of it all. And yet to have the ugly episode always in her mind! She wavered. Lack of courage did not restrain her as much as a conscientious scruple for fear of wounding him. But her selfishness ruled the day.

"There's one thing I must tell you. I destroyed your paper on the enfranchisement of the negro. You put it out on the hall table to be mailed, and I saw it and tore it up."

She drew a long breath of relief. Confession was good for the soul, and she felt she had cast a burden from her.

The Secretary's weary eyes met her own.

"Yes, my dear," he said.

Humiliated as she was, Portia laughed at his expression of resignation.

"I haven't broken all of the ten commandments yet, father. I have no further revelations to make." But she could have wept at his indifference.

He glanced up as she still lingered, and she read his expression of mingled dislike and nervousness.

She felt an almost impersonal pity for his condition as she went out of the room and left him to his work.

General Matthews was lying on the lounge.

"When did you come home?" she asked.

"I thought you were in town."

"I got in about half an hour ago," he answered. "I heard you talking in the library with your father, so I came on up here. I've been looking over my log-book."

She sat down on the edge of the bed and began unfastening her slippers.

"Are you going out? Do you want your walking-shoes?" he inquired, rising. He went to the closet and brought them out.

"Thank you," she said. "Yes, I am going out."

On her dressing-table was a bowl of roses. She knew at once that he had brought them to her. It was the first concession he had made for days, but she was not now disposed to accept it in any spirit of grace.

"I suppose you, too, despise me," she said, stormily, raising her blue eyes to his.

"Why?" he asked, making a weak attempt at subterfuge. He knew she must refer to the matter of the circular, but he did not wish her to think he thought too seriously of it. His heart had been full of pity for her ever since the painful dinner-scene, which had straightway caused him to forget his own grievances. But she had not afforded him the least opportunity to show his tenderness, and this was her first reference to that unhappy evening.

She gave him a look of scorn, and made no reply.

He felt himself a hopeless blunderer. "How should I despise you, my dearest? I knew of the circular the day before your father did, and I said nothing to you."

"Did you know I wrote it?" she cried, turning on him.

He hesitated. "I'm afraid I did. No one told me, but as I read it, it flashed over me that you had had something to do with it. I recognised your phrases, and then I remembered some paper Chadwick had been wanting to see you about. And, to be entirely frank with you about it, my dear, the paper sounded inexperienced to me, somehow like a woman. I—I—was very sorry about it. It was too late for me to hush it up. I'd have bought it up if I could."

She looked at his honest, anxious face, and her own flushed bright with mortification. Then he had known all during that terrible preliminary conversation at the table. How he must have pitied and scorned her! She could bear better her father's coldness.

"You are so good," she cried, shaking with anger. "You have such an idea of duty that I suppose you would not even permit yourself to laugh at me, or to admit what a fool I had been. Having married me, you had too much pride not to stand by me. Was that what you thought?"

"No," he said, simply, "I was sorry. I could only think, 'Poor Portia, poor child.' You see the instant I read it I knew it was a mistake, and I blamed myself in not having insisted upon knowing what Chadwick wanted of you that night. I ought to have been firmer. It was my fault."

She had finished lacing up her shoes, and now she rose, her heart beating heavily, and went to her hat-box.

As she took out her hat and put it on with trembling hands, she was reminded of how Countess Polonski's hands had trembled the afternoon General Matthews had entered the room and so insultingly ignored her. She opened her bureau-drawer and took out a pair of gloves, but did not stop to put them on.

"I am going for a walk," she said, and left the room without looking toward her husband. In the hall, as she was turning to go downstairs, she suddenly realised that she had forgotten an outside wrap, and went back to get it.

Matthews had not moved from his position on the lounge. He did not turn nor speak to her as she entered, but as she opened the drawer of her bureau to take out her purse she caught the reflection of his unhappy face in the mirror.

She went down the gravelled driveway under the Lombardy poplars. A strong wind was blowing, and the tree-tops swayed above her head as she looked up at the sky. It had clouded over within the last hour. She walked rapidly, drawing on her tan gloves, haunted by the expression on her husband's face. She wished she had said some little pleasant thing the second time she went out of the room. He irritated her by his oversensitiveness.

In about a mile and a half she reached the omnibus station. It was an open shed with a bench running around the three inside walls. Too impatient to sit still, she walked up and down while she waited. The omnibus came at last. An old gentleman, whose country residence was not far from them, got out and entered his carriage which had been waiting for him. Portia had turned her back toward

him so as not to be obliged to speak. Her mood was not one of cordiality.

As she entered the coach she saw two invalid soldiers, who, not yet strong enough to walk any distance, were enjoying the luxury of a first ride. She sat down opposite them, and they, with the freedom of their class, did not hesitate to address her in a spirit of bonhomie. Their childlike enjoyment of their trip, their quaint, shrewd comments, distracted her from her sombre mood, and she entered heartily into conversation with them. They on their part felt a gallant desire to entertain this gracious and beautiful lady. The more excitable of the two described a terrible battle-field. He was interrupted by his companion, who considered the details too horrible for a woman's ears.

"I was much interested," said Portia to him, "but I think you are right. It does no good to talk about it now that it is past. We all have much to forget." She sighed, thinking of La Cerf, the pity of whose death still lingered with her. She had to struggle not to feel herself responsible for it. "I suppose you are interested in politics," she continued, smiling. "Has it been definitely decided that the soldiers are to be allowed to vote?"

"Yes'm," answered the older of them, eagerly, "it'll be my first vote for a Presi-

dent. We're to send our votes home by mail."

"Who stands the best chance, do you think?" she asked.

"Don't you worry, ma'am," he replied, cheerily; "we boys want the President back again, and the people are going to vote with the soldiers, you can bet."

She had regarded them with kindly interest and admiration for their manliness. Now she experienced a revulsion of feeling, a dislike of their uncouth speech, and scorn for their primitiveness. They would cast their vote for the reelection of the President. And why not? Surely he was their kind.

She paid no more attention to them. The look of hauteur and coldness, the very expression which in her father had so often aroused antagonism, now settled upon her own features.

The two soldiers felt vaguely uncomfortable and rebuked. Scarcely more than boys, weak and sensitive from their sickness, they were depressed by her sudden change of manner. They now fully noticed how cold the wind had become and that the sky which had been so blue when they started was gloomy. They sat solemn and silent, now and then jogging wearily against each other.

Portia, absorbed again in her unhappiness and anxiety, forgot their presence. As the

omnibus neared a branch telegraph station she rang the bell for the driver to stop. She did not so much as glance toward the soldiers as she went by them on her way out.

Chapter XXIII

PRENTISS sought relief from the general depression in the house that evening by working on his play. As yet no decisive word had been received as to how the convention was going. Senator Chadwick sent contradictory telegrams. The last message, however, was hopeful, and West seemed to be winning.

Although the wind that had risen in the afternoon was still blowing high, it had not yet begun to rain.

General Matthews, after dinner, had had his horse saddled and ridden into town, promising to return as soon as any final word was sent in.

Prentiss was thankful to be alone and to shut himself away from the oppressive atmosphere of politics.

The green-globed lamp cast its soft circle of light over his paper. The marble bust of the Secretary seemed to watch him benignly as ever from its shadowed alcove. The splendid face had greater benignity of look in the marble than in the flesh.

The young man regarded it reverently. Long association with his patron had taught

him above all else to value his goodness and character. More unselfishly even than his daughter did Prentiss hope for West's triumph. His own ambitions lay entirely along scholarly lines, and he was willing that his own personality should be hidden behind a successful literary achievement.

His play was nearing completion. The Polonski dénouement had inspired him with a fresh conception of two of his minor characters, and he planned to use the striking incident of Chadwick's marriage as effectually disguised as possible. He, who had felt not the least personal sympathy for either the Senator or the impostor countess, now found his imagination fired by sympathy for their romance. He flung himself heart and soul into Chadwick's probable feeling, appreciated with him the mysterious fascination of the Russian's beauty, saw her upon the stage in the glamour of the footlights, realised the ardent love she had wakened so strangely in the man's unpassionate, narrow nature. And as he wrote on, her character cried out to him for sympathy so that he began to understand and pity her. She would not be able to endure the daily companionship of a man like Chadwick. It was not easy to step from the tragic to the commonplace. She must know that she had lived her life in experience if not in years. She was like a rare jewel, the cause of crimes for its posses-

sion, flashing a mysterious colour as the casket containing it was opened for a moment. So did she come from out the shadow of her past into Chadwick's life, to fill him for ever with longing and then to slip away into the deeper shadow. Prentiss saw that she must die. As the tragedy deepened in his mind his excitement made him rise and walk up and down the long room. This had changed the entire ending of his play. He could see it all enacted on the stage; he was watching the effect on the audience, their amazement, their dawning resentment at the playwright's presumption swallowed up in the absorbing tragedy.

"It is the way it happens in real life," he said aloud; "the tragedy occurs, and the thunderbolt from the clear sky strikes the person we thought most secure."

He stopped his nervous pacing up and down and resumed his seat at the table. He worked steadily for an hour, and then suddenly looked up, startled. The thought of Virginia had come into his mind. For a moment he seemed to see her seated opposite him on the other side of the table, her head bent, the soft light falling on her lovely profile, on the bit of blue velvet ribbon in her brown hair.

His inspiration left him. All his sadness returned. Why should he work? How empty his success would be without her! He put away his manuscript. He would work no

more that night. As he was about to close and lock the drawer he saw in the corner of it the string of coral beads. It was his sole memento of her. For the first time he became conscious that it was raining and that the steady downpour had continued for some time. He wondered if General Matthews had been caught in it, and decided to find out if he had returned. If he had he had not brought good news, otherwise Portia would have come in to tell him at once.

Or, he hesitated, should he stay and read? Read — what should he read? The work of a philosopher to recall by contrast all that was lovable and human? A poet whose written longing would intensify his own? What could console him for her rich presence? He would seek his old refuge in time of trouble; he had passed away so many dreary hours at the piano. He thought with bitter cynicism of those who could pray. His pride of intellect took away consolation derived from such a source.

Never had the wind seemed so wild and mournful before. How it howled down the chimney! It wakened an answering savage mood in him.

“It isn’t a civilised wind,” he muttered, “it blows cold from out the past when people believed in witches. On such a night as this the good folk must have heard the banshee sobbing at the door.”

He went out into the hall. The drawing-room opposite was dark. Evidently the family was up-stairs. The long hall was dimly lighted by a lantern Portia had brought home from Europe. It was made of brass set with discs of coloured glass. These glasses, blue, green, and scarlet, seemed to wink at him like wicked eyes.

The wind blew against the great front door and the rain rattled upon the glass. How the wind tried to force an entrance! A recklessness swept over him. Let the wind come in if it would. Why shut it out to listen longer to its banshee wail?

He seized the handle and flung open the door.

The wind whistled by him down the hall. There was a mist of rain; the roaring of the bending poplars down the driveway; the porch-lantern swinging, a yellow blur, in the black night. All this he saw.

But what was fallen against his breast, what hair was blown wet across his face?

He closed the door and shut out the wild night. He drew her into the library with him.

"Virginia, Virginia," he said. He pushed a chair toward the fire and made her sit down. Her hat was gone; her long travelling cloak was dripping wet; the edge of her skirt and her feet were covered with mud. She was shivering with cold and exhaustion.

"Who is sick?" she asked. "Is it Uncle Phineas?"

"My darling," he cried, "no one is ill. What brought you home at this hour of night? What has happened?"

"I thought something terrible had happened. I thought I would never get here. Portia telegraphed me to come home."

"Nothing has happened," he assured her. "Nothing. Portia wanted you home. Perhaps your uncle asked for you."

He drew her cloak from her and flung it aside. It had protected her dress so that her shoulders were quite dry. He added another log to the fire which blazed up cheerfully. Kneeling on the rug in front of her he drew off her shoes. They were heavy with mud and water.

"How did you get here like this, Virginia?" he asked.

"I had to take a late train up from Alexandria, and it was eight o'clock when we reached Washington. The hackman I engaged to drive me home was drunk, and just after we left the city he collided with a farmer and one of the carriage wheels came off. They began to quarrel. Oh, it was awful to hear them talk to each other! I opened the door and called to them to stop, and the man who was driving swore at me and told me to hold my tongue. And then, David, I was so angry to think that

they would quarrel when perhaps you, or Cousin Tom, or Uncle Phineas, was ill, and Portia needed me. I got out and ran down the road past them. I hadn't been afraid before, but running away seemed to make me afraid. I thought that drunken man would follow and try to kill me. And if he did, then you would never know I loved you."

She had been leaning back in the chair. Now she raised herself and put out her arms to him kneeling before her.

He gathered her close to him. "Virginia," he said, looking down at the wet, tangled head upon his breast, "you never doubted my love, did you?"

She lifted her face to smile at him. "No; but I was afraid of you. I knew you would be angry with me and so I went away. But I didn't go so far that you couldn't come to me. And you never came! Every day I watched for you. Every night I thought you would come to-morrow."

The austerity she dreaded settled again upon his face.

"I said to myself you would have to come back to me," he answered. "It was not for me to follow you after the letter you left."

Her mouth drooped and trembled. She wanted her lover, not the chiding tutor of the old days. Timidly she put her face forward

and kissed him, thinking to win him back to tenderness.

Beneath that timid kiss his own heart throbbed. He laughed out, suddenly, joyously.

"Did the wind bring you here this wild night, Virginia? Were you the banshee that I heard wailing at the door?"

Her eyes smiled at him. "I called and called and pounded on the door, but no one came to let me in."

"The wind was so loud," he said. "Sit still, dearest, sit still. The others in the house do not need you yet."

He chafed her little wet stockinged feet and pushed back the soaked hem of her dress that her ankles might get the heat from the fire.

"Hear how the wind howls down the chimney," she said. "Does the fire make you think of the one they had at the gypsy-camp? David, I never told Portia about her Jersey cow, did you?"

He laughed. "I never did. I was afraid she would scold me for not letting her know at once."

Her face saddened, and he knew of whom she thought. "Listen," she said, holding up her finger. "The wind sounded just now like Mr. La Cerf's music. Can you hear it, too?"

The sudden anger that swept over his face frightened her.

"David," she said, piteously, "I never loved him, although I thought I did. It was always you."

"I know it, but why did you turn to him from me?" he cried, bitterly. "How can I forget it? Had he been a gentleman, but an Indian!" Ashamed of his lack of generosity, he hid his face on her lap.

She put her hand on his head. "Once you said to me, David, that we must not ruin our happiness by indulgence in any morbid thoughts, and while I was away I used to think of that. I told myself that if you ever took me back I would be wise. And you must be, too." There was a new tone in Virginia's voice, a suggestion of deepening maturity. He raised himself to look up at her. Had his little girl suddenly become a woman? "And you must not act like a foolish, jealous boy if you wish to help me to be wise," she added, gently.

"Was there ever any one like you, my darling?" he cried. "How have you become so quickly old?" He was filled with delicious amusement.

But her answering gaze sobered him. Grief had changed Virginia from the child to the woman. Tenderness, even deeper than he had known before, spoke now in his embrace.

His sense of protection was awakened. He must never let anything more occur to grieve her. He felt that he held his wife in his arms, and that it lay with him to make her happy.

"I must build up the fire, dearest, and then I will go and get you something to eat and drink," he said. But first he brought an afghan from the lounge and wrapped it around her.

Leaning back in the chair she watched him dreamily. The warmth, the peace, the old love come back. What more could she desire? Her eyes closed wearily. The battle with the wind and rain on the mud-furrowed road had exhausted her slight strength. But now she was home once more with David.

When he turned to speak to her again he saw that she was almost asleep. Her head, with its loosened masses of wet brown hair, nestled in the bright-coloured folds of the afghan he had drawn around her. Her lips were slightly parted. One hand rested on her breast.

How fair she was, how weary!

He noticed that the hair about her temples, beginning to dry, curled in soft tendrils.

"Virginia," he whispered, bending over her.

She did not move to his whisper. Her warm breath was on his forehead.

The silence filled him with loneliness. He

remembered La Cerf, and thought that she, too, some day would die.

He knelt beside the chair and flung his arm across her.

“My dearest,” he cried, “do not sleep so long!”

He buried his face on her breast. For a moment it had seemed to him as if he were losing her again.

Chapter XXIV

SECRETARY WEST had retired early. A little before ten Portia looked in upon him.

He was sitting up in bed reading.

"Are you perusing that dismal book again, father?" she asked.

"No, my dear," he answered; "I was turning over my Burns."

"How did you know I meant the Bible?"

He chose to ignore the question.

"It seems chilly to me in here. Are you warm enough?"

"I am entirely comfortable," he answered, his fine eyes meeting her own calmly. Whatever his emotions might be, he would show to her but the outward face of pride. There was something brave and simple about him as he lay there amid the homely furnishings of his room.

She seated herself at the foot of the bed.

He reached over, and took a paper from the table.

"I have here a letter to be sent only in case my own State goes against me. Of course

I shall destroy it if my friends prefer me to any other candidate. The reason I have for writing it beforehand is, that should it be necessary to send it, it will reflect neither dissatisfaction or passion, nor acquire an unjust tone because of my purely personal disappointment."

She took it and glanced it over, and re-read the closing paragraph.

"And I may add that it affords me much gratification to reflect that those who desired my nomination desired it on public grounds alone, and that they have not hesitated to act on such grounds only. It has been the pleasure of a majority of our friends in Ohio to prefer another. I accept their action with that cheerfulness and willingness which is due from me to friends who have trusted and honoured me beyond any claim or merit of mine."

She returned it to him. Quite satisfied with his own judgment, he did not observe that she made no comment, and he put it down again on the table.

The letter had almost killed her hope. The words had a fatal sound to her mental hearing, as if they were to endure.

Suddenly his self-control was swept away by emotion too long suppressed.

"I would have nothing to say against the President's reelection if his kindness of heart were equalled by his ability, but his policy is

one of compromise perverted by an abortive humour. My ambition has been an honourable one, and I should have no right to hold it were it not for my confidence in my own strength. I feel that I can bring this war to a speedy close, but above all am I convinced that if I do not continue to hold command of the financial system I have introduced, it will become more productive of evil in time of peace than it has accomplished good in the hour of war."

She could not reply for the many thoughts that crowded her mind. The realisation had at last come to her that their continued love for each other depended upon his success. Her ambition and pride had never required anything of him but position. If he failed he would never forget the unfortunate secret circular. Moreover, how could he be sure that she would not scorn rather than sympathise with his humiliation? How could she even be sure of her own feeling for him if at this last he failed her? She had done everything for him. The flaw must be in him. She had made a rich marriage, although she was forced to admit her husband's money had helped them more socially than politically.

"By the way, Portia," he remarked, "I happened to see a notice of Senator Chadwick's marriage in the *Tribune*. I thought it would not be long before the papers got it."

"I am not at all surprised," she answered. "I wonder if the marriage will turn out to be for the best. He will make money and keep his place in the Senate, and she has great tact, so that in the end they will have as good a position as any of us. The world forgets our early mistakes if we have present success. Poor Katrina! If she doesn't love Chadwick she will feel as much an adventuress as ever in spite of her marriage."

"I am very sorry for her," said the Secretary, "very. An unusual woman. She had the most remarkable eyes I ever saw. They were wonderfully expressive." He recalled her attentive attitude whenever he spoke, her gentle manner, her little domestic airs, the jar of orange marmalade she made herself and brought to him. He sighed.

Portia laughed. "Evidently I didn't send Chadwick any too soon for my own peace of mind, did I, father dear?" She rose. "I will bring you word the instant it comes."

Left alone, the Secretary put aside his Burns, and turned to his Bible. In it was to be found strong meat for men. He read, and the excitement of renewed hope flushed his face. He felt that success could not fail him. Outside his window he could hear the steady fall of the rain, but his attention was strained for the sound of Matthews's returning.

Mrs. Matthews went down-stairs smiling

at the look of annoyance her intimation had brought to her father's face. She saw Prentiss coming through the hall from the dining-room, and called to him. "Wait, David, I want to speak to you. I am a little worried about Tom. It really is a dreadful night for him to be out. He went on his saddle-horse, but I think he will have the common sense to take a carriage home, and leave his horse in town, don't you?" She had not thought of it before, but she began to resent the fact that Prentiss himself had not shown sufficient interest to go.

"I think so," he answered, looking up at her. He was carrying a tray on which was a glass of wine and some bread. "Virginia has come home. She is tired, and wet with the rain."

"Why, when did she come?" she cried, amazed. "I had no idea the child would take my telegram so seriously as to start this very night. Father seemed to miss her, and so I telegraphed her to come as soon as possible. Where is she?"

"No, no," he interposed, eagerly, "not yet. It is so long since I have seen her."

The light in the hall was dim, but she could see the expression on his face. It filled her with wonder.

"How you love her," she exclaimed, "how you love her!" She gave him a good-natured

little push. "Go back to her, David, I wouldn't disturb you for worlds. I've had enough of your moping around these last weeks like a love-lorn swain."

Their friendship, which had been trembling in the balance since the dinner scene when she had confessed her part in the secret circular, was suddenly made secure by that touch on his shoulder. He knew she forgave him for having witnessed her humiliation.

"Portia," he said, earnestly, "God knows I am not worthy of her."

"Oh, spare me, David," she retorted, lightly; "as many as twenty men have said that of me."

But when the library door had closed upon him she sighed. Long ago his face had been turned to her with just such an expression. Then she heard the faint echo of Virginia's sweet laughter. It was long since any of them had laughed in the house. Her father, Prentiss, all loved Virginia, and she — Terrible and morbid thoughts oppressed her. She remembered that her cousin's room needed to be prepared, and she went back to attend to it, glad of the relief of action.

On the way she stopped at the linen closet and took out the clean sheets and pillow cases, fragrant with lavender. As she lighted the candles on the mahogany bureau she was reminded of that late afternoon in the fall when

she had found Virginia dressing. What years ago it seemed!

She made up the little bed and put the fresh slips on the pillows and the ruffled Swiss cover on the bureau. Then she went to get one of her nightgowns, for Virginia's trunk would probably not come until morning.

Her own spacious and comfortable room, with its elaborate and lofty moulding, its chintz-covered furniture, the fragrance of roses, the firelight reflected in the mirror, welcomed her. Her maid had been in and left the kettle of hot water on the hearthstone and turned down the covers of the bed and lowered the pillows for the night. On the sofa was the general's log-book, lying open face down as he had left it.

Her slippers and wrapper were laid on the foot of the bed.

She knelt down and opened the lower drawer of her bureau and found a nightgown with a blue ribbon run through the lace at the neck. Blue was Virginia's colour, and she felt an unusual tenderness of mood. She could never forgive her father for his preference in loving his niece best, but it was beneath her to be long jealous of Virginia, who was but a child.

Until this evening she had not allowed herself to think of what she should do if her father failed. She wished she had some loved art to

fall back upon, but her only talent was a social one. She was more intellectual than artistic, and she had a masculine quality of mind which made her love public and political matters. Mere society bored her unless the power were given her to create a court not inconsistent with the republic, where the diplomatic and political parties might meet and men of wealth or genius congregate.

Travelling was too near akin to idle pleasure to satisfy her energetic and ambitious nature. Study did not appeal to her save as it led to practical results, and the thought of a woman following a profession offended her fastidious worldliness.

"I should have been a man," she said, bitterly. "I am at last worn out and discouraged with this striving to make the men of my family amount to something."

In a little while, indeed any moment now, she would know if the great prize of the Presidency were to elude her father again. It was the third time he had tried for it. Did Ohio fail to endorse him now for the nomination he would withdraw his name out of very pride. She recalled the words of a well-known American. "Gentlemen, let there be no mistake. I should make a most excellent president, but a bad candidate." Surely the words applied to her father.

Well, if he failed she would still have left

her husband and domestic happiness. What irony of consolation!

Oh, would Tom never come to let her know how the convention stood!

She thought she heard the sound of a carriage and so ran down to the front door and opened it. The flame in the lantern on the verandah had been blown out by the wind. She stared into the black night and heard the rain and waited, listening some moments, but no other sound came. She stepped outside and lighted the lantern again. The wind had died down. Her old horror of suffocation in such a dark night returned. The solemn monotony of the unseen rain was fearful to her. She strained her eyes to see beyond the wavering circle the lantern cast. Suppose her husband in some reckless mood had decided to ride home, as he had started, on horseback, and the horse had stumbled and thrown him. In her nervous condition this fear became a conviction.

The next hour was one of increasing agony. She held her watch in her hand. If he did not return within that time she would order the servants and horses out and search for him. Why had she ever permitted him to venture out this miserable night? At least he should have seen that it was going to rain, and have taken the closed carriage. Never even while he was at the war had she known

this anxiety for him. She tried to think why this had been so; then she remembered that as long as she had had her father she had been contented. But now he had turned from her, and her husband was all she had left. How unfailingly kind and good Tom had been to her! Only that afternoon he had been so contentedly reading his log-book. As she looked back upon it now he seemed pathetically boyish and simple in his soldierly pride. She wished she had kissed him good-bye before she went out to telegraph to Virginia. There came into her mind a vision of that quiet room up-stairs, their room where she had nursed him during his long illness, where so many nights they had slept side by side. What if that room should never know his actual living presence again? She tried to imagine her life without him, but she was too intelligent a woman not to appreciate how lonely she would be without his sympathy and support. The ever-present sense of the lovers in the adjoining room was oppressive. The marriage of Virginia would push Portia a step on in life. And when youth left her what would she be if her husband too were gone? A lonely old woman talking over her conquests of bygone years, giving her bits of real lace and jewelry to the girls of a yet unborn generation, who would listen to her aged vanities! She shuddered.

The opening of the front door, when she had gone out to light the lantern, had sprung slightly the library door, so that the voices of the lovers might have reached her distinctly had she chosen to listen. But it had been an idle sound in her ears, until all at once she was conscious of Prentiss's pleading voice.

"My darling, won't you believe me? I never loved Portia."

She lifted her head amazed, then felt her face burn with shame. The tender, half-regretful thoughts she had often bestowed upon that early attachment stung now like whips. In that moment she knew that if anything should happen this night to her husband, she would never wish to see Prentiss again.

She had not prayed, except conventionally, for years, but now she did so, and with the simplicity of great distress and consciousness of human helplessness she promised that she would receive with thankfulness the news of defeat if her husband were returned to her safely. In this eager choice for her best happiness she took not the least thought for her father waiting in almost unendurable agony of mind for the decision of his friends.

"And even if I were to die," spoke Virginia's lovely voice, "you would still —"

Portia buried her face in her hands. How could she live if he did not return! There were horses' hoofs on the driveway. A mo-

ment later she heard her husband's step on the verandah.

There was the great relief, the second of blessed thankfulness, then all was swept aside in the wave of hope that confident step inspired. Her fears had been groundless. Her father had carried the convention! Her pride, her ambition, the future looming rich, the love of power, these mingled emotions ran through her like a flame of glorified life.

Her eager fingers could scarcely open the door. She ran out and met him.

Matthews held her tightly in the rain that beat about them. Against his own he felt the wild beating of her heart, and in the misty yellow light of the lantern he could see her face white and luminous.

"You must tell your father," he said, "for I cannot. Ohio has declared herself for the President."

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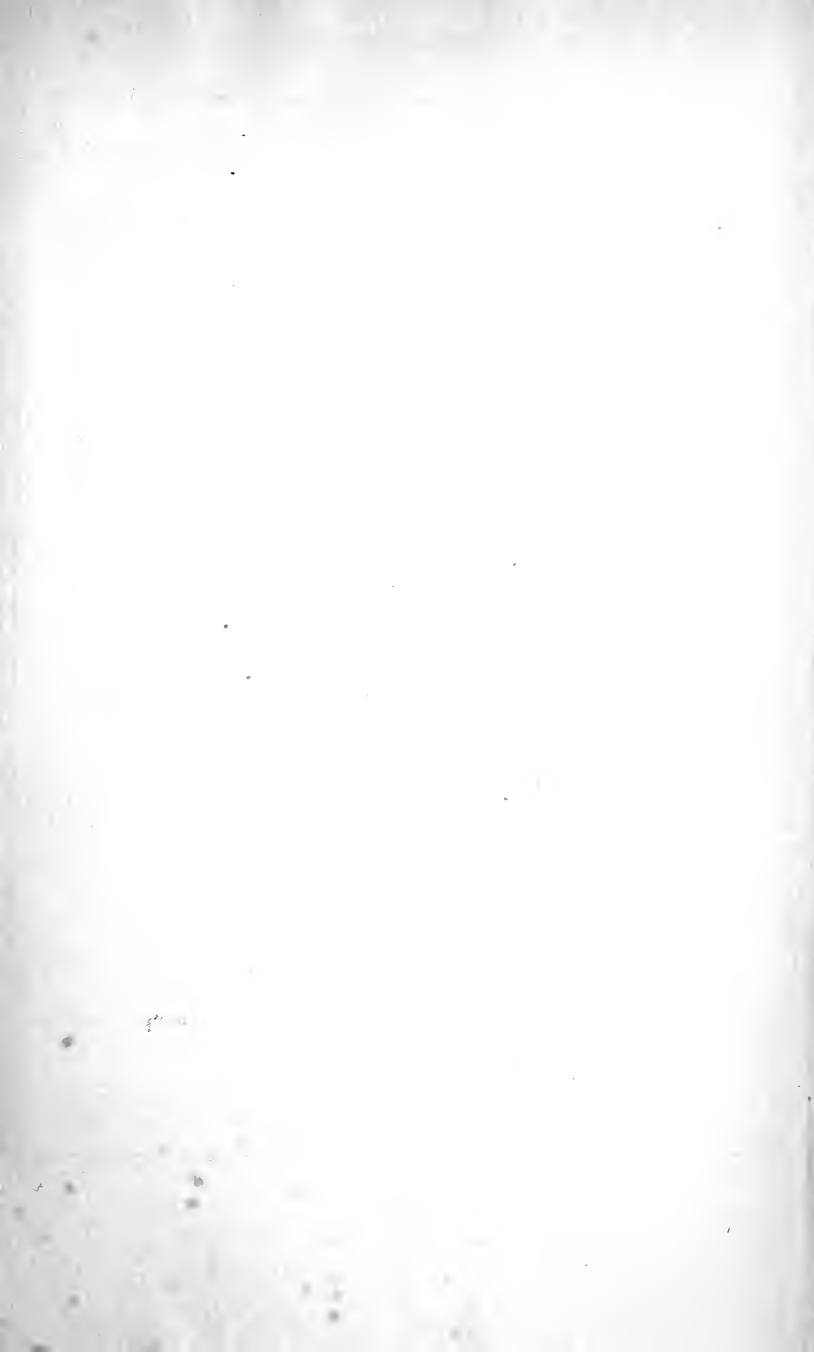
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